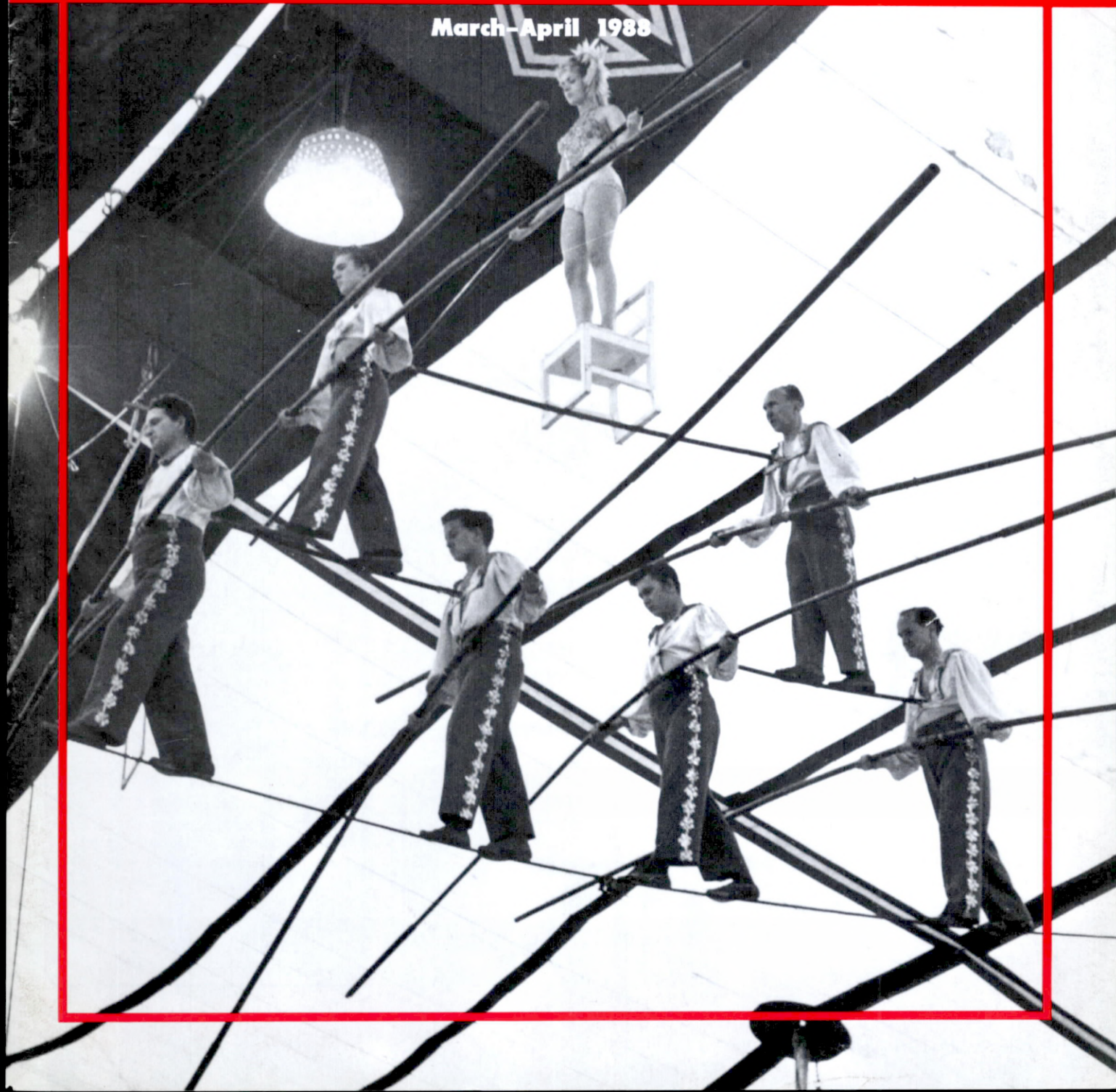


**The Ringling-Barnum 1956 Season**

# **BANDWAGON**

**The Journal of the Circus Historical Society**

**March-April 1988**





# The Journal of the **BANDWAGON** Circus Historical Society

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March-April 1988

FRED D. PFENING, JR., EDITOR

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## THIS MONTH'S COVER

The photo shows the Great Wallendas on the Beatty-Cole Circus in 1961. This season may have been the last that the troupe appeared under canvas. The pyramid consisted of Dick Faughnan, Mario Wallenda, Paul Jordan and Karl Wallenda on the wire, on the second level were Johnny Jordan and Herman Wallenda, with Patsy Jordan on top. Photo from the Pfening Archives.

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#### THE PRESIDENT COMMENTS

The dues notices will be mailed soon. As in the past, members will have the opportunity to show their support of the Circus Historical Society by becoming Sustaining, Contributing, and Concessionaires Club members by paying \$25, \$50, or \$100, rather than the standard rate of \$17. Members who pay these amounts will again receive a special certificate of appreciation.

Last year 127 members honored themselves and this organization by joining in one of the three special categories. The result was a great year for the organization with a record number of pages in the *Bandwagon* and a surplus in the treasury at the end of the year. The editor currently has the largest backlog of articles ever and if the money is available this coming year's *Bandwagon* will be even bigger and better.

With your help we can continue to make the CHS and the *Bandwagon* greater and grander.

#### CONVENTION UPDATE

Planning continues on the big 1988 Circus Historical Society convention to be held on the Big Apple Circus at the Shelburne Museum in Shelburne, Vermont from August 10 to August 13. The Windjammer Econo Lodge in South Burlington has been chosen as our convention hotel. It has won numerous awards from Econo Lodges of America, including the 1986 National Gold Award as the top Econo Lodge in the country. Located close to both the Burlington airport and the Shelburne Museum, the Windjammer Econo Lodge is located on 52 secluded acres. It features a health spa, an outdoor pool, and a nature trail. We have reserved 50 rooms. The rates will be \$49 single and \$59 double. These are excellent rates, particularly since our meeting comes at the height of the tourist season.

The Windjammer Econo Lodge has a reputation for excellent food. The banquet meal will be a buffet featuring their fine New England cooking.

We have had an excellent response to the call for papers with Frank Robie, Bob Kitchen, Joanne Joys, John Polacsek, and Richard Flint all agreeing to give presentations. The Circus World Museum has also agreed to allow us to show some of the treasures from their wonderful film archives. Other highlights of the convention will be talks by Big Apple personnel including William Woodcock and Robert Gibbs, a performance of the Big Apple Circus, a showing of the tremendous Shelburne

Museum circus poster collection which will be part of a day at this nationally famous museum, a great fun-filled banquet, and, of course, the ever popular circusiana auction. Ample time has been set aside for jackpotting.

The Burlington-Lake Champlain area is one of the country's great summer vacation spots with dozens of historic attractions in the area. If there was ever a convention to bring the entire family, this is it.

A convention and hotel registration card will be included in the May-June *Bandwagon*. The CHS registration fee has not been set at this time; however, it should be in the range of \$40-\$45.

Literature on the hotel, Shelburne Museum, and the Lake Champlain region are available from Fred D. Pfening III, CHS Convention, 2315 Haverford Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43220. Remember the dates August 10-13 for the big 1988 CHS convention

#### DIRECTORY AVAILABLE

Secretary Treasurer Johann Dahlinger has completed a new directory listing all CHS members which Editor Fred Pfening, Jr. has typeset on his Desktop Publishing system. To obtain a copy please write Fred D. Pfening III, CHS Directory, 2315 Haverford Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43220. Copies are free to members only and will be sent within two weeks of receipt of a postcard or letter. The directory is being distributed in this manner rather than as a mass mailing to all members to reduce the postage expense. The CHS will save approximately \$400 by mailing the directory only to those to desire it. Please include your address when writing for your directory.



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# RINGLING BROS. CIRCUS BARNUM & BAILEY

## 1956 A SEASON TO REMEMBER

I caught the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in Madison Square Garden on April 28, 1956. I visited the backyard of the Garden for the matinee and saw the night show from the seats. As I entered the Garden I noticed picketing by the American Guild of Variety Artists and the Teamsters. During my visit there was some evidence of the strike against the show, but it was surviving.

During the performance I noticed that Merle Evans was not directing the band. He had been replaced by Izzy Cervone, who brought a couple of fiddle players along with him. Cervone's circus experience had been with indoor circuses. When I checked the program I noticed other changes. In 1955 Count Nicholas was ringmaster and Harold Ronk was the vocalist. Preston Lambert was listed as ringmaster and vocalist. Irving Caesar had provided the lyrics for John Ringling North's songs in the 1955 performance, the songs in the 1956 show were written by Frank Loesser. Vertes replaced Miles White as costume designer. Barquette was the aerial director. Long time Ringling employees Richard and Edith Barstow were back to stage the 1956 production numbers. Pat Valdo and Bob Dover returned as general director and equestrian director. Max Weldy again provided the costumes, floats and elephant blankets.

"Mexicanorama," the aerial ballet, again featuring Pinito Del Oro. "Say It With Flowers," a spec featuring Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, closed the first half of the show. The elephant number was called "Ringling Rock N' Roll" and included an eleven piece elephant band. The closing spec "Hoop Dee Doo" included the band marching led by a champion majorette.

Returning for the 1956 performance

### By Gordon E. Turner

were Paul Fritz, lions; Trevor Bale, tigers; Albert Rix, bears; Miss Mara, single traps; Charlie Moroski, liberty horses; Tonito, low wire; Alphonse De Jonghe, chimps; Justino Loyal, bare-back riding act; Roberto de Vasconcellos, dressage rider; Palacios, flying act; Alzanas, high wire and Nocks, sway poles.

Acts that were new to the show in 1956 were: Victor De Jonghe, aerial apes; Rebertes, acrobats; Della Chiesas, juggler; Canestrillis, foot balancing; Dschapur and Rutha, equilibrists; Les

During my visits to the Ringling circus in the Garden over the years I have always been on the lookout for any new equipment on the show. Looking back to the visit in 1956 I was unaware of anything different than prior years. Surely if I had had any feeling that season was to be the last I would have made at least mental notes on what had been brought to the Garden. Thanks to Ed Lester, however, it is possible to list the equipment brought to New York for the indoor date.

The actual loading list is not available, however, a complete inventory the New York train follows.

Sixteen flat cars, numbers 112, 113, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 103, 104, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110 and 111 carried these wagons:

No. 10 Menagerie department, 14 feet.

No. 12 Elephant department, 14 feet.

No. 14 Commissary 18 feet.

No. 30 Ring stock & Wardrobe, department 17 feet.

No. 31 Wild animal act arenas, 29 feet.

No. 48 Concessions (Midway joints), 17

feet.

No. 57 Aerial act rigging, 23 feet.

No. 58 Props, 18 feet.

No. 59 Props, 19 feet.

No. 60 Concessions (Supplies), 20 feet.

No. 61 Props, 19 feet.

No. 64 Uniforms, 17 feet.

No. 71 Monkey cage, 12 feet.

No. 72 Tigers cage, 12 feet.

No. 73 Leopards cage, 12 feet.

No. 74 Chimp act cage, 12 feet.

No. 75 Lions cage, 12 feet.

No. 76 Baboons & Mandrill cage, 12 feet.

No. 77 Forage and meat, 12 feet.

No. 78 Polar & Brown bear cage, 12 feet.

No. 79 Lion cage, 12 feet.



The big addition to the 1956 Ringling-Barnum Circus was the suspended menagerie tent. It was used less than a dozen times during the short tour. The forage and meat wagon No. 77 is in foreground. Circus World Museum collection.

Arthuros, ladder balancing; Five Verdus, rolling globes and Titos head jumps.

Long time Ringling clowns in 1956 included Emmett Kelly, Otto Griebeling, Paul Jung, Felix Adler, Paul Jerome, Freddy Freeman, Albert White, Charlie Bell, Dennis Stevens, Gene Lewis, Prince Paul, Jimmy Armstrong, Frankie Saluto, Myron Orton, Owen McQuade Joe Nawrath, Harry Klima, Carl Stephan and Alvin Schwartz.



No. 80 Orangutan cage & equipment, 12 feet.

No. 82 Rhino cage, 21 feet.

No. 85 Hippo & baby hippo cage, 21 feet.

No. 86 Giraffe wagon, 19 feet.

No. 87 Eland cage, 18 feet.

No. 92 Tiger act cage, 23 feet.

No. 93 Lion act cage, 18 feet.

No. 94 Big bear act cage, 23 feet.

No. 97 Gorilla cage, 28 feet.

No. 99 Props, 21 feet.

No. 102 Concessions (Candy top), 19 feet.

No. 104 Timekeepers, 19 feet.

No. 117 Horse shops, 17 feet.

No. 125 Wardrobe (Male), 22 feet.

No. 130 Train department, 14 feet.

No. 131 Wardrobe (Spec), 21 feet.

No. 134 Wardrobe (Female), 27 feet.

No. 135 Chimp act cage, 17 feet.

No. 136 Veterinary, 18 feet.

No. 137 Ring stock equipmeny, 16 feet.

No. 141 Wardrobe (Trunks), 20 feet.

No. 142 Wardrobe (Spec), 21 feet.

No. 143 Wardrobe (Trunks), 20 feet.

No. 145 Wardrobe (Spec), 21 feet.

No. 146 Wardrobe (Spec), 20 feet.

Merry-Go-Round float, 12 feet.

Twelve Girls float, 14 feet.

Frog float (Jeep), 12 feet.

Tulip float, 18 feet.

Elevator float, 19 feet.

Swing float, 16 feet.

Custard truck, 22 feet.

No. 5 Truck department Jeep, 12 feet.

Station Wagon, 17 feet.

Station Wagon, 17 feet.

No. 1 Bus, 31 feet.

No. 234 Water truck, 20 feet.

No. 235 Wrecker truck, 20 feet.

No. 237 Water truck, 20 feet.

No. 238 Water truck, 20 feet.

No. 239 Water truck, 20 feet.

No. B4 D4 Crossing Cat, 11 feet.

No. B10 D4 Crossing Cat, 11 feet.

No. C5 Mule, 11 feet.

No. C6 Mule, 11 feet.

The horse stock cars were:

No. 349, 24 Liberty and 6 high school.

No. 350, 11 Rosin back, 18 Misc., 1 Riding.

No. 351, 12 Liberty, 12 Draft, 7 Riding.

No. 352, 36 Burros & 4 Riding.

The elephant cars were No. 223, 224, 225 and 226. They carried 51 elephants; 24 baby Asian, 1 baby African, 7 medium and 18 large. ("Emily," an African died in the street in New York.)



Large crowd waiting for show in Poughkeepsie, New York June 6, 1956. The new suspended menagerie top is on left. Turner photo.

The sleepers were No. 122 "Indiana," 123 "Nebraska," 248 "Nevada," 249 "Florida," 254 "Wisconsin," 364 "Chicago," 365 "New Orleans," 366 "San Antonio," 367 "Bridgeport," 368 "Seattle," 369 "Little Rock," 370 "Pittsburgh," 371 "New Orleans," 374 "Louisville," 374 "Portland," 376 "Washington," 379 (no name) and the "Jomar."

I was excited about the news of the Clyde Beatty railroad circus coming east. Everybody was talking about a real old fashion billing war. But that was a short lived dream as the Beatty show closed in May, the first casualty of the 1956 circus season.

When the big show opened its under canvas tour, following Boston, I planned a weekend trip to possibly attend three circuses. On the weekend of June 8 and 9 Ringling-Barnum was playing Newark, New Jersey, Hunt Bros. was in Flemington, New Jersey and King Bros. was stranded on the lot in Somerville, New Jersey.

I caught all three shows on Saturday,

The new big top and back yard in Poughkeepsie, New York June 6, 1956. Turner photo.



June 9, 1956. I was hoping to catch Ringling again on June 10 when it played Poughkeepsie, New York.

The weekend of June 8th and 9th took a lot of planning, traveling and limiting the visit in the three locations. But everything worked out just fine.

When arriving between shows on the Ringling-Barnum lot in Newark there was a light

drizzle. It was somewhat a damp day, but the show looked beautiful on the lot. There had been a late arrival and the matinee did not start until 3 P.M.

The show had opened under canvas in Baltimore on May 17 and had played thirteen road stands. During these early stands there had been some problems. The lot in Washington on May 24 was very muddy and the horses and elephants did not work the opening matinee. During the night show on May 27 Elizabeth Nock's sway pole broke, but she was caught in mid-air by her husband. In Philadelphia on May 28 the matinee started at 6 P.M. The baby elephants bolted during the night show on May 31. In Atlantic City June 5 another late arrival held the matinee until 5:20 P.M. The menagerie and horse tents were side walled.

Because of the significance of this final year under canvas it is important to list the inventory of the Baltimore train containing all of the remaining equipment needed for the outdoor dates. We are again indebted to Ed Lester who recorded the inventory as it was loaded in the Sarasota winter quarters. The quarters was closed to visitors for the loading and it was only done once. This loading order is a most interesting piece of circus history as it was the last time the show was loaded on rails for under canvas stands. The loading was as follows:

Seat wagon cut consisting of eleven flats, No. 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362 and 363. All were 70 footers and contained two seat wagons each. (In the normal loading these eleven flats comprised the "seat cut" and traveled



as a group in the third section.)

Wagon cut and first section of flats:

Flat No. 227 (72')

No. A3 D7 Cat, 16 feet.

No. 109 Midway light plant, 18 feet.

No. 111 Big top light plant, 17 feet.

No. 241 Welding truck, 16 feet.

Flat No. 114 (70')

Gas truck, 20 feet.

No. 2 Bus, 31 feet.

No. 103 Backyard diner, 17 feet.

Flat No. 105 (72')

No. 124 Tickets and office, 16 feet.

No. 122 Tickets and office, 17 feet.

No. 123 Tickets and office, 20 feet.

No. 121 Tickets and office, 17 feet.

Flat No. 228 (72')

No. 120 Side show front, 21 feet.

No. 70 Side show front, 12 feet.

No. 38 Big top stakes, 17 feet.

No. 29 Band department, 18 feet.

Flat No. 229 (72')

No. 115 Side show front with front door, 19 feet.

No. 116 Side show front with concessions, 19 feet.

No. 112 Big top light plant, 17 feet.

No. 110 Backyard light plant, 17 feet.

Flat No. 230 (72')

Midway diner truck, 26 feet.

No. 3 Sanitation truck, 19 feet.

No. 49 Popcorn sales wagon, 18 feet.

Flat No. 231 (72')

No. 1 Men's rest room, 28 feet.

No. 2 Ladies rest room, 28 feet.

C1 "Set In" Tractor, 10 feet.

Flat No. 232 (72')

No. 20 Horse tent, 19 feet.

No. 114 Light department, 17 feet.

No. 6 Tire Jeep, 17 feet.

Station Wagon, 17 feet.

Flats No. 233, 234 and 235 (all 72') each carried two seat wagons.

All the 200 series flats normally comprised part of the wagon cut (nine flats) on the regular train and traveled with the second section. Flat No. 114 was normally part of the cage cut (9 flats) of the first section. Flat No. 105 was normally part of the cookhouse cut (nine flats) and was also part of the first section.

Gas cut flats:

Flat No. 236 (70')

No. 8 Dining tent, 20 feet.

No. B1 D4 Canvas Cat, 12 feet.

No. 7 Cookhouse ranges, 19 feet.



No. 38 big top stake wagon. The steel construction is typical of the last wagons built by the show. Turner photo.

No. 6 Cookhouse Dishwasher, 19 feet.

Flat No. 237 (72')

No. 233 Water truck, 20 feet.

No. D1 D7 Cat (A5) Dollie, 21 feet.

No. 3 Cookhouse ranges, 19 feet.

No. 1 Cookhouse water, 16 feet.

Flat No. 238 (72')

No. 250 Stakedriver truck, 20 feet.

No. 5 Dining equipment, 14 feet.

No. 108 Stakedriver wagon, 15 feet.

C4 Mule, 12 feet.

No. 2 Cookhouse light plant, 12 feet.

Flat No. 239 (72')

No. 4 Cookhouse supplies, 20 feet.

No. 252 Big top canvas truck, 31 feet.

Flat No. 240 (72')

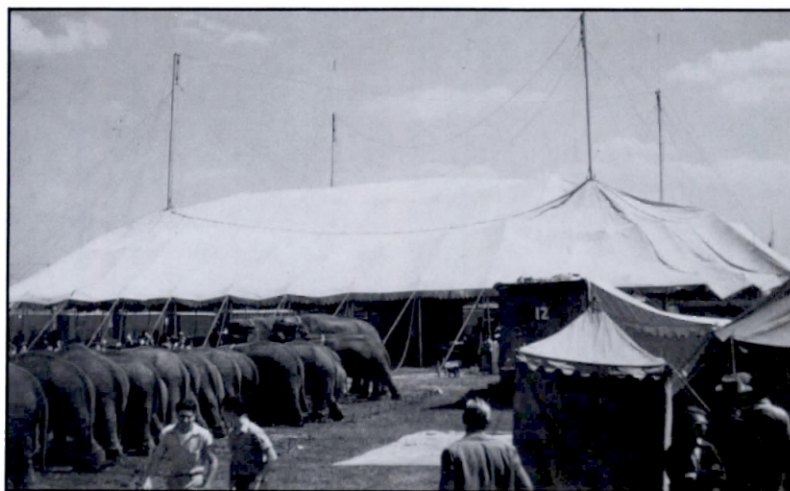
No. 251 Big top sidepole truck, 31 feet.

No. B2 D4 Stakepuller Cat, 12 feet.

No. 105 Light department, 18 feet.

No. 2 Big top department dump truck, 12 feet.

Another view of the unusual new menagerie tent used by Ringling in 1956. George H. Barlow III Collection, New York State Museum, Albany.



Flat No. 241 (72')

No. 253 Big top canvas truck, 31 feet.

No. 9 Blacksmith shop, 19 feet.

No. 119 Side show front, 21 feet.

Flat No. 242 (72')

No. 7 Seat department Jeep, 12 feet.

No. B7 D4 Crane Cat, 11 feet.

No. 44 Big top quarter poles, 50 feet.

Flat No. 243 (72')

No. B6 D4 Crossing Cat, 11 feet.

No. 43 Big top center poles, 62 feet.

Flat No. 244 (70')

No. 254 Menagerie tent truck, 31 feet.

No. B5 D4 Stakepuller Cat, 12 feet.

No. B8 D4 Crane Cat, 12 feet.

No. B9 "Donut," 16 feet.

All of these flats normally comprised the gas cut (9 flats) and traveled on the second section. The Baltimore train left Sarasota on the Atlantic Coast Line. ACL provided two locomotives for the move. Following the locomotives came the seat cut flats, wagon cut flats with First Section flats, gas cut flats, the advertising car, sleepers No. 247 "Connecticut," 250 "Utah," 251 "Idaho," 252 "Sarasota," 253 "Ohio," 121 "Indiana," and an Atlantic Coast Line coach.

I noticed that all the ticket and concession wagons were painted red, white and blue in vertical stripes. The row of ticket wagons with the large sign overhead was moved up to the front of the midway and there was a new type blue and white marquee. A sign with running lights reading "CIRCUS" was hanging in front overhead.

Directly behind the marquee was the newly designed menagerie tent. It instantly reminded me of the article in the 1942 program about the big top

modernization of the future. This tent was somewhat different than the poleless tent covering Mr. and Mrs. Gargantua, but was suspended by cables on the outside. I was almost afraid of what the big top might look like if this tent proved itself. I guess I was against change, but I





John Ringling North, Michael Burke, Richard and Edith Barstow posed during a Sunday afternoon show in winter quarters just prior to the show leaving for New York in 1956. A color photo of the four appeared in the book sold on the show that year. Fred Pfening, Jr. photo.

must admit I was fascinated by this design and it was impressive to see on the lot.

As I wandered around the lot a group of roustabouts huddled around a small fire seeking some comfort from the dampness. There was a new stable tent for the horses with round ends. Upon entering the brand new big top, I found it very impressive. The blue canvas was less than a month old and this only the eighth time it had been in the air. A group of girls were practicing on the new ladder type webs. Another change I found was that the donicker wagons were now spotted inside the big top instead of in the connection.

I walked through the menagerie and found it also impressive. I roamed the lot, knowing that I couldn't get caught up there for fear of not staying on my schedule catching the other shows in Flemington and Somerville. If I was to become involved in the night show my project would be sunk.

Coming on on the midway I noticed a long gray limousine with special New York plates. The initials JRN appeared on the plates. The car was parked just outside the front of the ticket wagons. John Ringling North was just getting out and then took a very slow walk down the midway. His chauffeur waited in the car. This was the first time I had ever seen North on the lot. I wondered why he was there.

Time was going too fast. I left and drove to Somerville. The King Bros. Circus had given a performance there the day before on June 8th. When I ar-

rived on the lot some of the trucks were loaded and the big top was down. The animals and elephants were on a picket line. But things were at a complete standstill.

The cookhouse was up and baloney sandwiches were available. I met Bert Pettus, who was changing a tire. We talked and he introduced me to several performers. I offered to take him and his family

out for a meal but he declined.

They had given a show the day before but were not permitted to move off the lot. There was a license plate problem, and the state police cars were parked all over the place. Nobody knew what was going to happen next. The big banner-line mounted on trucks was there. I remembered it from the former owners, Cole Bros. in 1949 and 1950. I pulled some half burned tickets from a small fire.

The police were trying to remember faces so I left the troubled King show and traveled to Flemington to catch the Hunt show. The Hanel bar act was coming from the closed Beatty show to join Hunt. Everything on the Hunt Bros. Circus seemed fine.

The next morning on Sunday, June 10, I traveled to Poughkeepsie, New York as planned. When I arrived at the



Dyer Reynolds and his midway novelty joint. The ticket wagons are in background. Turner photo.

railroad yards the big top center pole wagon was just coming down the runs. The show was late due to a derailed car and I knew I hadn't missed much action. The matinee started here at 5 P.M. There were several fans waiting at the yards. On hand were Louis Brucie and Jim Donovan, who was the New York Central freight manager and controlled the show train in this area.

I knew the lot was outside the city as I had been there the prior year. That time it rained hard in the morning and my mother lost her shoes in about eight inches of mud. She went bare foot the rest of the day.

Arriving on the lot I found a group of fans and we stayed all day, attending the night show. Because the show was late all the horses were on picket lines out in the open. But everything else was erected and the matinee and night show shows came off without incident. It began to rain lightly just after the night show started. It was been a successful weekend, I had made all of the circus visits I had planned.

Things in the circus business were unsettled. *Life* magazine came out the week of July 16 with a picture story of all the troubles of Beatty and King and indicated that the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus also had woes. We already knew this, but now my mind went back to seeing Johnny North on the lot in Newark and I knew now why he was there.

Another indication of unsettled business was the fact that the Ringling show was up in the air about their dates. Along with a number of seasoned bosses, John Ringling North had dismissed Frederick "Babe" Boudinot, who had served as Ringling-Barnum general agent for a number of years. The show did not have this veteran contractor to firm up the 1956 route.

A tentative route had been laid out during the winter. A copy of this typed route covering dates from May 15 to August 26 was found in the collection of the late George Barlow, which is now at the New York State Museum in Albany. Mr. Barlow visited the Sarasota winter quarters each winter and this tentative route was probably given to him by a Ringling official during his visit early in 1956. A review of the actual cities contracted prior to the show closing in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in July reveals that a number of changes were made both in cities and dates. Stands on the tentative route that were not contracted included: Haddensfield, Plainfield, Asbury Park and Ridgewood, New Jersey; Pittsfield, Massachusetts and Sharon, Pennsylvania. Hicksville, Long Island, New York was played on June 12 and 13 rather than Long Island City the same days. Most of the tentative cities were played, but not all on the dates originally scheduled. The tentative route beyond Pittsburgh took the show back to



Ohio for seven stands, and into Michigan for dates in Detroit, Jackson and Kalamazoo. South Bend, Kokomo, Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Indiana came next then Decatur, Bloomington and Springfield in Illinois with St. Louis, Missouri listed for August 1 to 5. Quincy and Galesburg, Illinois followed. Two dates in Iowa at Davenport and Dubuque headed the show into Wisconsin at Janesville, with Madison, Oshkosh, Appleton, Manitowoc, and Milwaukee next. Chicago was scheduled for August 18 to 26.

A number of cities were contracted and listed on route cards that did not appear on the tentative route, including Meadville and Moundsville, Pennsylvania and Canton, Alliance, Zanesville, Columbus, Springfield, Dayton and Middletown, Ohio.

My mother was the deputy town clerk for Colonie, New York, where the show played their Albany date. The town was unsure what day the show would exhibit. A letter dated June 1, 1956 was sent to Al Butler, care of the Ringling New York office at 10 Rockefeller Plaza, advising that permission was granted for the show to play in Colonie for one day June 25, 26 or 27, at a fee of \$100. Giving the show a choice of dates was a first. The Albany date was being contracted less than four weeks ahead.

This late booking of stands was eased by the fact that the show had discontinued the use of an advance advertising car. A radical change by North was the complete abandonment of outdoor advertising and the use of window lithographs. This was brought about primarily with the employment of press agent Milton Pickman, a west coast movie publicity man. The concentration of advertising was in television and newspaper ads. After the road season opened the need for outdoor advertising was recognized. And an advance brigade traveling by truck began tacking cloth banners and inserting window cards.

When the show played Springfield, Massachusetts the weekend of June 23rd I had hoped to see it again, but couldn't make it. But the show was to arrive in Albany the next morning Sunday, June 24th to play on Monday the 25th.

As always I looked forward to the return of the big show. Sunday show arrivals had always been a big event here in Albany. As a young boy I was lucky from the start seeing all of the shows in my hometown. My parents were interested enough to always take me. We



The 1956 marquee was blue and white striped with red lettering. The electric sign CIRCUS was suspended between two high poles. Turner photo.

would pack a lunch and stay all day until all the work was completed and come back the next day for the performance. Sometimes we caught it again in Schenectady or Pittsfield, Massachusetts. We saw Dailey and Cole. Several times Ringling and the big Strates carnival passed each other on the same Albany lot.

When Ringling arrived on June 24, 1956 it was a beautiful day. As usual the large crowd was at the runs behind the Albany post office and one could view the large colorful cloth banners that were tacked over the city's skyline. This was the first Albany date in many years. Again the show was late in arriving from Springfield.

When flat car No. 109 passed over an apparently open switch there was a derailment and the wheels of the loaded car were left on the ground. Jim Donovan quickly dispatched a NYC crew with

The No. 4 route card in 1956 listed some of the dates contracted beyond Pittsburgh. Pfening Archives

SEASON

NUMBER

1956

4

**OFFICIAL TOUR**

General Offices and Winter Quarters

SARASOTA, FLORIDA

Allow Mail Enough Time to Reach Points Named Before Date Given

New York Office

10 Rockefeller Plaza

DATE	TOWN	STATE	RR	MILES
THU JULY 5	NIAGARA FALLS	NEW YORK	NYC	58
FRI - 6	BATAVIA	-	NYC	39
SAT - 7	BUFFALO	-	NYC	25
SUN - 8	-	-	-	-
MON - 9	WARREN	PENNSYLVANIA	NYC-PRR	93
TUE - 10	ERIE	-	PRR-B&E	75
WED - 11	MEADVILLE	-	B&E-ERIE	49
THU - 12	YOUNGSTOWN	OHIO	ERIE-PRR	60
FRI - 13	AKRON	-	PRR	51
SAT - 14	CANTON	-	PRR	46
SUN - 15	ALLIANCE	-	PRR	18
MON - 16	PITTSBURGH	PENNSYLVANIA	PRR	75
TUE - 17	MOUNDSVILLE	WEST VIRGINIA	PRR-B&O	79
WED - 18	ZANESVILLE	OHIO	B&O	81
THU - 19	COLUMBUS	-	B&O-PRR	74
FRI - 20	SPRINGFIELD	-	PRR	74
SAT - 21	DAYTON	-	PRR	35
SUN - 22	MIDDLETOWN	-	PRR	34

*Season Closed Suddenly with explanation "the show under canvas is a thing of the past"*

jacks to lift the car up and back on the rails. This took sometime and we all remained at the runs until early afternoon. Both Donovan and Phil McGrath, the show's trainmaster, supervised the operation.

After the horse and elephant cars were unloaded and the animals started on their walk to the lot, we all moved on to the action on the show grounds. Upon arriving we found the cookhouse erected with breakfast long over.

The horse stable tent, menagerie and side show were already in place. Behind the suspended menagerie we saw the center poles positioned and resting in their jacks while the big top stakes were being driven. That was the extent of work for Sunday. The spotting of various wagons coming on the lot plus the animal housing continued. The main tent was to go up on show day, the 25th. Suddenly everyone's attention was attracted to an escaped monkey that was racing back and forth across the top of the sideshow tent.

On show day Michael Burke called a meeting of all the show people in the backyard. His plea was for a complete and trouble free performance. He asked for everyone to try to overcome some of the problems that were affecting the performance. Just before show time workmen had to climb to the peak of the big top to secure the lacing that somehow was parting.

The show's next date was Schenectady, New York on June 26th; the run was only about 15-20 miles. The rail yards and runs were on Edison Avenue right next to the giant General Electric plant where I was employed. In fact there was a cut of flat cars right outside the building where I worked. Again there been a late arrival and everyone, including myself, was watching the action of the cookhouse wagons being unloaded into a traffic jam.

My boss was very interested in the circus; as a youngster he was in the big top of Barnum & Bailey during the Schenectady fire of 1910. Many people I have worked with through the years talked about this fire, the Wallendas falling in 1937 or past wagon accidents on Broadway hill in the early fifties.

In 1952, during a rain, a string of Ringling wagons tipped over and completely flattened several parked cars. Another time at the same site a Strates show heavy



generator wagon snapped off a telephone pole. Also in Schenectady Terrell Jacobs had his arm broken in an encounter with one of his lions. Schenectady was known to show people as a jinx town.

The grounds were located outside the city on a sandy lot next to an Army installation. The route encountered a steep hill right on a curve just above a gully on one side.

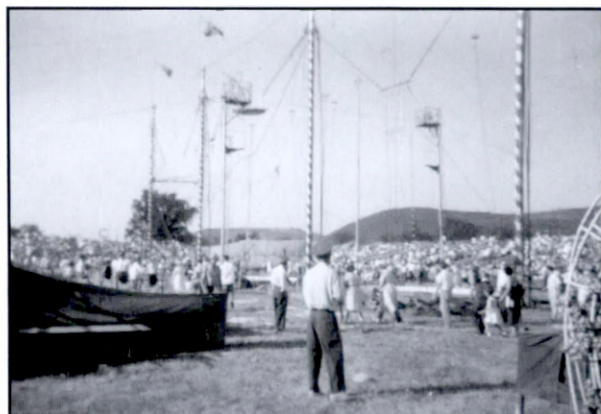
A great number of my fellow workers planned to attend the show after work, but I couldn't wait. I went to the lot on my lunch hour. When I arrived there was quite a bit of activity taking place. The menagerie was sidewalled, the big top was in the air and the work of hanging the rigging and spotting the seat wagons inside was in progress.

I planned to go back to the grounds that night right after work. As I was returning to the lot on Campbell Road and started to climb the threatening hill I came upon some of the cookhouse wagons coming towards me around the curve. They were on the return trip to the train and were being towed by a caterpillar. I could tell right away the driver was in trouble. I slowed in my climb and gave them a lot of room. All the wagons, including the caterpillar were sliding sideways, almost coming across into my lane. They all made it okay but in passing the driver's face gave an indication of relief. He had had a frightening experience.

When I got to the show grounds I purchased a colorful hard cover book published by the show that season. I bought it from Pinito Del Oro's husband. After the night show I stayed until the big top was lowered and the canvas was rolled.

Heading for home I was approaching the turn coming down the same hill again, I saw that there were red flairs all over the place. There were a couple of men standing along side of the road. There had been an accident. It was about 2:45 AM.

I found that a caterpillar descending with the heavy generator wagon No. 109 had gotten into trouble just as the cookhouse had earlier, and had slid across the street, gone through a cable guard rail, and snapped off a telephone pole which was swaying from the wires which suspended it above. It was a fifty foot embankment. Both



Side walled big top with rigging suspended from center poles in Elmira, New York July 2, 1956. Turner photo.

the caterpillar and the generator wagon were in the bottom of the gully.

Looking down with a flashlight everything was found to be upside down. The smell of oil filled the air. The men had jumped just in time. A tractor and two Mack trucks from the show were called, and by securing the front bumpers of the two trucks together to gain leverage, they winched the equipment up and out. The accident was cleared by 4:50 AM and the train departed from Schenectady for Utica shortly after 5:00 AM.

In later years I have seen photographs of the dark welding marks on No. 109 where they repaired the roof and front portion of the generator wagon, as a result of the events of this accident.

It is remarkable that on two successive days two accidents occurred, and in each one a piece of equipment bearing the number 109 was involved. The flat car 109 in Albany and the generator wagon 109 in Schenectady. Was it the persistence of the Schenectady jinx? When the train arrived late in Utica for the June 27 show the matinee was delayed for one hour and fifteen minutes.

People waiting to exchange reserve seat tickets for standing room in seatless big top in Meadville, Pennsylvania July 11, 1956. Brucie photo.



Schenectady was to be the last of my catching the Ringling show in my immediate area. I later learned that Pete Brewer, seat boss, had been hit by the train and lost his legs as the train was pulling into Utica the following day. Izzy Cervone left the show there for a few days and was covered by his cousin Jack.

A couple of days later the Mills Bros. Circus played around the Albany area. I visited with Jack Mills. He showed me a telegram that was delivered to him. It was from Floyd King who was looking for a spot. Mills stated he couldn't use him but he would send him a hundred dollars. "It's part of show business," he said.

The King Bros. Circus was stranded and broke. Floyd King left his show and found a position with the Ringling-Barnum front office routing the show. Later he was to be employed by the Clyde Beatty show which reopened on August 30, 1956.

Someone on the Ringling show sent me route card number three which listed the tour across New York state. I was swayed. I packed a movie camera, an old box camera, tape measure, sketch pad, pencils, a couple of tee shirts, dungarees and a pair of boots. I knew a number of people who might find something for me to do. Whatever happened, I was on my way.

I planned to catch the show at Geneva, New York on Sunday July 1. The route card stated that it was to be a matinee only. I hoped to arrive on the lot in time to catch the teardown. It was a beautiful sunny day as I moved west on the New York Thruway.

Unknown to me at the time a Mack water truck had been stolen from the show somewhere along the route, I think in Syracuse. As I neared the Geneva exit I started to wonder how much trouble it was going to be to find the show grounds. This worry was soon over, for I came upon a big red truck with large white numbers. I knew right away it was a Ringling Mack, but why was it in the Thruway? As it turned out

the truck was being retrieved and was in the process of being driven back to the show. I followed it right through the toll gate straight to the lot.

The singular Geneva performance, the matinee, was just breaking when I drove up, but there wasn't any evidence of a teardown.





The D-2 dollie wagon with A-2 Cat coming off the runs in 1956. Brucie photo.

Only the cookhouse was being loaded. I parked in a small lot just off from the side of the big top. The menagerie was sidewalled again (a common practice in 1956) most likely due to the late arrival. In talking to several show people I found there was to be a night show in spite of the published schedule. If a last minute decision to add a performance had not been made the circus would have been saved from a most unfortunate event.

As the small audience of about 1,500 came dribbling on to the midway the side show talkers were heard to be joking between their ticket booths of how lonesome they were becoming. I was in the backyard talking with a couple of grooms and they were worried about some rain later. The performance was now underway with a far from full house.

It could have been the combination of an earlier beautiful day and a matinee only scheduled but the big top seemed not to be guyed out quite as tightly as normal. There were some dark clouds approaching and the wind was picking up enough to make one notice the flapping of the sidewalls. Things were changing. A motorcycle patrolman was

The B-8 Crane Cat is shown pulling a Mack truck out of the mud in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Brucie photo.



on the way to warn the circus of the approaching storm. But the wind arrived ahead of the messenger.

Gusts were picking up about everything that was loose. The marquee went down in a cloud of sawdust. Behind

us the stable tent was lifted into the air and carried several hundred feet. A large group of performing horses had just left the big top and were standing at the back door. Some other horses were either cut loose from the interior picket line or had broken loose and were running all over the lot.

Jimmy Armstrong could be heard blowing a distress signal to alert the performers of the danger. The big top was now a helpless sitting duck. I was about to witness something that I had never seen before.

Several heavy gusts lifted the mammoth tent up off the ground so high that those standing outside could momentarily see right through the interior of the tent. The side poles were almost above the backs of the seat wagons, the quarter poles dancing and protruding through the canvas to the outside like arrows each time the tent settled. This tent was new and more or less remained intact until it could no longer withstand the tremendous wind forces. I can still hear catcher Dick Anderson yell out, "There she goes!"

Show people were credited with directing patrons, but when the ridge of the tent split lengthwise over their heads along the center poles, there was considerable panic with people scrambling over one another to exit the big top. Three sections of canvas, poles, lights and rigging all fell on top of approximately 800 people sitting in one area. Show personnel were now cutting the heavy wet canvas with knives.

Soon there were many ambulances and fire department rescue squads on the scene. There now was a drenching downpour.

I realized that if the rest of the tent should let go it would be tipped over or blown into the parking lot. As

it was, the center poles held and were left standing holding up the rest of the mess. On the way to move my car I helped Louie Gustow and Dyer Reynolds retrieve some of the garbage that was scattered all over the midway. They were busy chasing a novelty stand that was rolling down the midway.

In the end the newspapers reported 14 to 26 people were injured and a show employee was found on the ground paralyzed with a back injury. However there were no fatalities, and it was a good thing there was not a full house for this performance. The cleanup went into the night, with thoroughly soaked workers. Some of the men were getting electrical shocks every time they touched certain wagons. Several of us went down to the cars at the runs. Nobody really knew what was going to happen. It rained all that night.

Most people ran to their autos rather than stand in the rain for refunds, they were just relieved that they had escaped without injury. One ticket seller told me later that they kept the window open until the wagon was ready for the move to the rail yards. It was at this time he accidentally lowered the window on an angry patron's head.

The next morning, July 2, not knowing what to expect I went back to the lot. The show was gone. Only the sodden sawdust that filled the three rings was left. I found a piece of blue canvas from the scalloped edge of the tent. It is today a treasured item in my collection. As I walked around the empty lot I wondered how long they would be without big top canvas, or if it could be repaired at all. As history now tells us the tent was never repaired or used again.

Circus spokesmen stated in the local news that a rough estimate of damage to the big top was between \$20,000 and \$30,000. It was only approximately twelve weeks old. The giant blue top with its colorful flags and white sidewall was beautiful. It looked so majestic on the lot. One must be a true lover of the circus to understand the thrilling beauty of a big top.

It didn't take long for the news to spread about the storm. Full pages of pictures and stories were in the morning papers along with accounts of the injuries and damage. As things turned out I didn't call home until three days later. I was too wrapped up in the Ringling show's activities. I started out for Elmira, the show's next stand. The rain stopped and the sun came out; it was going to be a nice day.

The circus played the Chemung fairgrounds at Horseheads, just outside Elmira. They were still unloading at the



yards, and were very late arriving. The matinee started about 4:00 PM. The cookhouse was in normal operation as it had escaped the storm. Everything for this date was going to be side-walled.

The wet canvas from the tops was spread out all over the lot on the grass. The tents were a complete mess, ripped and full of holes. Many of the lines, ropes and cables were either broken or had been cut. Some of the tents were apparently cut down to save them. Men were already busy splicing the canvas, but the sewing and repair work went on for days. As an indication of the force of the wind, several roustabouts worked with sledge hammers over an anvil to straighten a pile of bent steel stakes.

The main task was now to get ready for a matinee performance. Because of all the news there were large crowds, both the curious and paying customers. People were all over the lot. The night audience was waiting for the matinee to break, with almost back-to-back shows.

I cannot remember if the damaged canvas from the main tent was on the lot. I didn't see it anywhere. They probably knew from the cleanup the night before they couldn't use it. It might have been stored on the train. The show sent for a replacement tent from the winter quarters in Sarasota. It was to be a couple of more days with blue sky performances. Just the sidewall and center poles would be employed to define the "big top."

There had been considerable damage to some of the folding chairs on the seat wagons, both from heavy poles falling on them and the result of the patrons scrambling through them in their hurried effort to exit the falling tent. To add to all this a seat wagon on the way to the lot that morning was sideswiped by a truck. Because of this several rows of chairs were damaged along the railings. I remember a pile of broken chairs that had been removed from the wagons for repair. The flying return riggings were broken and the pipe twisted into a strange shape. A couple of musicians were concerned about their violins and cymbals.

The circus played three days in the open in Elmira, Olean and Dunkirk, New York. Everybody enjoyed the blue skies and sunny days. Night performances were held under the stars. The show was very lucky with the weather during this period. One must remember besides all the added trouble about the storm the circus was also fighting a



The C-5 Mule is shown in front of seat wagons on flats in 1956. Man with hat on left is trainmaster Phillip McGrath. Brucie photo.

union strike situation with pickets at some stands. In Buffalo they were marching in front of the ticket wagon before each performance. It was hard to determine if the late arrivals and uncertain matinee times were attributed to a slow down, lack of bosses, or a combination of tramping hardships. The circus had always been a well oiled mechanism and would recover from the results of the storm.

In Olean on July 3rd the matinee did not start until 4:00 PM, because of another late arrival. Here the side show tent was put back in the air. Apparently it had sustained limited damage. Perhaps it was protected somewhat by the heavy bannerline wagons, or had been cut down in time. In any event they had it back. At this stand there was a high ridge or bank at the rear of the backyard and there were hundreds of people at show time peering into the performing area. It was also at this stand that there was a beef about some elephants that a handler let wander into a body of water behind this hill. It turned out to be the city's water reservoir!

Because of the crowds and the openness of the situation there had to be guards around the sidewall during the performance. On one occasion, while guarding a position, I had a conversation with a roustabout and just happened to mention my visits with Bert Pettus and Jack Mills a few weeks before. The man told me he had just joined Ringling coming from the stranded King show and how they had quite a time of it. His story was very interesting and he hadn't known about Floyd King being in the office routing for Ringling. He was concerned as were others about the troubled future of the Ringling show.

The show played Dunkirk, New York on July 4th. I watched the holiday

festivities from the seats with some friends. The elephant department beat the big top crew by driving a wooden stake in 19 seconds. I finally decided I better call home and let the family know I survived the storm. The starting times of the matinees varied, but were usually late. There was so much talk and speculation of circus problems that veteran employees wondered how long the show could continue under these trying conditions. One even mentioned the show going into buildings. While others said it was impossible because there weren't enough in the nation to allow a profitable routing.

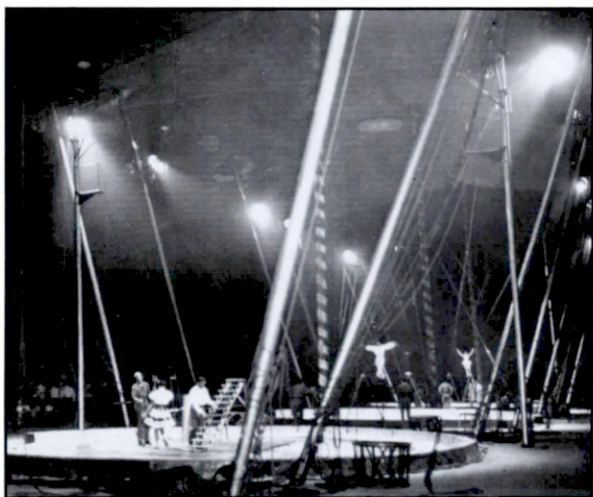
Next came Niagara Falls on July 5th. It was a dreary drizzly day. Another delay, caused the matinee to be cancelled. This was where the show received the replacement big top. The menagerie was again side-walled. The horse tent canvas looked as though it had been penetrated by a cannon shot. There was no matinee given here, the erection of the big top being a long affair. Apparently all kinds of adjustments had to be made to all the rigging and cables. Also I believe some changes had to be made in spotting the seat wagons. The donicker wagons had been located inside the new 1956 big top. Now they were placed outside in the connection. It could have been that this tent used in 1955 was somewhat smaller. When in the air, it was apparent that it had already had a full season's tour on it. There were some holes, one that was quite large. If this was to last for the rest of the season some repair work would have to be undertaken. The night show was given around 9:00 PM once again under the big top.

The show moved to Batavia, New

Teamster pickets on a Ringling-Barnum lot during the 1956 season. Pfening Archives.







Titos head jumping act, Tonito wire act and Attalini wire act during the final performance in Pittsburgh July 16, 1956. Pfening Archives.

York on July 6th, and was placed on an uneven bad lot with high grass. It was a damp day with muddy conditions. Straw was spread the length of the soggy midway, through the marquee and into the sidewalled menagerie.

Because of the muddy conditions when the ticket wagons were lined up the overhead signs overlapped slightly at tipped angles. The big top and side show was erected, but on this day all the horses were at pickets lines out in the open. This could have been due to the repair work that was needed on the canvas of the stable tent. It was damp and cloudy with light rain all day. After the night show I was invited to stay all night at the home of Ray "Sabu" Moreau. He was working in the elephant department.

Early the next morning I dropped Moreau off at the elephant cars in the rail yards in Buffalo. Buffalo was a two day stand on July 7th and 8th.

Moving on to the lot I found much activity as the menagerie top was going to be erected for this two day stand. Lloyd Morgan was sorting out the mass of cables that had to be attached to the canvas. The horse stable still had a few holes, but repairs made in Batavia made it useful once again. It was amazing the amount of damage and trouble the show went through and recovered from as a result of the Geneva blowdown.

By noon everything was in the air, the show was now put back together and once again looked like a normal layout. It was a fine sunny day. There was picketing both days and during show times they marched in front of the midway, shouting to the approaching crowds not to attend the circus. They warned that the show would soon

be out of business. That Saturday night there was a get together at the home of circus fan Roger Towne. I attended with many of the show personnel. Jimmy Ringling was afraid to be away from the show that night; he wanted to be around in the event there might be trouble.

I had become so involved in all the events of the week the days seemed to run together. I realized that I had to be back at work the following Monday morning.

My last day with the show, Sunday July 8th, started with clear weather. Two shows were scheduled, and as I remember a complete matinee was given. There had been times along the route where the big opening cat acts had to be omitted.

With the menagerie tent again erected I couldn't resist spending some time studying its interior and construction. This tent was only erected at a few stands. I saw it in Newark, New Jersey; Poughkeepsie, Albany and Buffalo, New York. The Buffalo stand may have been the last time it was used.

In the early forties I remember viewing Mr. and Mrs. Gargantua from the top of my father's shoulders as we passed under and through their poleless tent. But unlike the suspended gorilla tent of past years, this tent used side poles and a stake line. On several occasions I noticed the side poles seemed to be lifting and dangling a little off the ground. This could have been due to the tent not being guyed out tightly enough. The four high center poles protruded through the canvas and were in a square layout instead of the conventional row. The canvas was suspended from outside with a network of cables hung from the tops of the poles. The complete effect resembled a huge umbrella. I wondered if something like this design could really become the big top of the future. The show was fortunate that the menagerie tent was not erected in Geneva at the time of the storm.

I realized that sometime this day I

would have to start for home and make my departure from the excitement of the lot. I liked the pork chop sandwiches served out of the backyard grease joint. But on this day I was invited by the Karoly equestrians to join them at their table in the cookhouse for a complete chicken dinner.

Toward the end of the matinee the weather started to change. The sky clouded, a wind was coming up and another storm was definitely on the way. The weather became so threatening that the night show was cancelled and the crews started the teardown. This time no chances were going to be taken. This big top was an old tent and would not take much abuse and it had to be made to last the remainder of the season. If they lost this canvas the problems could be insurmountable. I stayed until all the tents were lowered, the canvas rolled with only the center poles still standing. I left at this point, just as the rains came.

Louis Brucie arrived on this day and

Newspaper ad used by the Ringling-Barnum Circus in 1956. The show did not make it as far as the Columbus, Ohio stand on July 19, 1956. Pfening Archives.

stayed on for a few more stands. He witnessed the show fighting the very muddy conditions in Meadville, Pennsylvania, where for the first time in the 86 year history of the Ringling show performances were given without seats. The matinee didn't start until 6:30 PM





Mack trucks parked in winter quarters after the show returned in 1956. Turner photo.



A canvas canopy was placed over seat wagons for the Sunday afternoon shows. Turner photo.

and the night show started at 10:00 PM with the 6,500 patrons sitting on the ground.

It was clear that veteran management people like Art Concello, Frank McClosky, Walter Kernan and Bob Reynolds were sadly missing. Although other long time employees were in charge it did not move like the well oiled machine of prior years. The show was just not moving on time.

It was believed by many circus observers that the show was suffering from a shortage of working men. The union situation contributed to this.

After Meadville the show moved to Youngstown, Ohio where the show arrived on the lot and found it occupied by a big top erected by a local revival meeting. The Ringling show had a contract for the lot, but had to wait until the other tent was removed before setting up. The Youngstown lot turned out to be quite muddy which caused further delays.

On the way to Akron, the next stand, a flat car was derailed and although it was reported that the date was cancelled, it is understood that performances were finally given. The next day in Canton, Ohio John Ringling North arrived at the rail yards after a stake wielding fight was broken up.

Finally on Sunday, July 15 ten circus employees, including Pinito Del Ora, were injured when they were knocked out of their berths in the sudden stopping of the train as it was pulling into Alliance, Ohio. Evy Karoly's horse "Baby" received a very bad gash on the rear flank, the injury being stapled by Doc Henderson. During the erection of the big top five workmen were injured. As a result the matinee was three hours late in starting. The night show followed an hour behind the usual starting time.

In spite of the chain of events effecting business was surprising good at all of the northern New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio stands. It was acknowledged by those on the show that business so far was far ahead of that at the same time in 1955. It had been a good season business-wise.

But the matinees were lucky to start by 6:00 PM. Conditions were just about impossible and the result would be that the last performance of the "Greatest Show on Earth" under canvas was given in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on July 16, 1956. John Ringling North closed the show, returning it to the Sarasota quarters. The big show as we knew it had disappeared forever. It was one week to the day after my returning to my job in Albany.

A few weeks later I visited with Poodles and Grace Hanneford at Frontier Town, an amusement park at North Hudson, New York. They had arrived there recently following the early closing of the Beatty show. They had secured a booking that was to last for many, many years.

In the fall of 1956 I went to Sarasota, Florida. I had never been to the winter quarters of the circus. I have returned several time since but things were so different thirty-one years ago. Since those days Sarasota has built up and the winter quarters grounds are long gone.

Upon my arrival I passed through the main gate with the large overhead sign. I had seen the entrance many times on postcards and in the circus programs. As I toured the quarters, things were very quiet and there were few people on the payroll. The show owned animals were on display. One of the Cristianis was working with a Doberman dog act under a small tent. The gorilla cages were spotted under a blue and white tent that was open on both ends as a walk through. Anna and Louie Gustow were working novelties out of the quarters refreshment stand.

Some show horses were still stabled

here but the big riding act of the Loyals was on the reopened Beatty show. Ilonka Karoly returned to Europe, but her cousin Evy, Roberto De Vasconcellos and other performers were giving Sunday shows in quarters. A big cage was erected next to the animal barn and either the cookhouse or the side show tent was erected with high poles over the seat wagons in front of the arena.

All the ticket, office and bannerline wagons were jammed into the ground floor of the big menagerie building. They were so close together one could hardly walk between them. Also stored there was the large and luxurious open car of John Ringling North, as was the small tab wagon. Upstairs piled all around were the bales of canvas, trunks and a large stack of ring curbs. Over in one corner a man was working at a bench, he had a whole pan full of sequins that he was stripping from some elephant blankets.

In a field outside a large group of wagons were parked in a row. Some were loaded with equipment, poles and rigging. It seemed impossible in my mind that these wagons would never be used again. In another area lined up against a building was all of the show's motorized equipment--the Mack trucks, caterpillars and tractors.

I spent a lot of time in the graveyard studying the old wagons. I recognized several of the menagerie cages that had last been used in 1948. The United States bandwagon was there, or should I say what was left of it. I also saw the old center pole wagon used when the show had a six pole big top. Barely visible on the sides of some of the rusting wagons were the faded stars that decorated the midway modernization of the early 1940's. Sitting at an angle was the rusty body of a green Mack "Bulldog," with a wooden water tank.





Cage wagons in the graveyard of the winter quarters in 1956. Turner photo.

Scattered throughout the quarters were wagons that today we know have happily ended up in one another of the circus museums. Others didn't make it, such as the old Al G. Barnes ticket wagon that was being used for storage purposes.

I found the ragged remains of the 1956 destroyed big top spread out on the white sand of the grounds. Several peacocks were enjoying themselves as they investigated the many folds of ripped canvas. Even though many years have gone by, every time I visit Sarasota, I am drawn to Oriente Avenue and I stand on the corner where the quarters were located.

The closing for good of the Greatest Show on Earth under canvas received a lot of press coverage. Early in December of 1956 columnist Westbrook Pegler wrote about his visit to the quarters in Sarasota. He commented: "The blow that finally drove the circus off the railroads and out from under the canvas tents was a campaign of harassment by two unions. They were a St. Louis local of the teamsters and the American Guild of Variety Artists. The circus charged the St. Louis local had no conceivable claim to jurisdiction in the City of New York where the picketing began at Madison Square Garden, and the demand by AGVA that the management pay per capita per week into a 'welfare' fund was simply a shakedown."

"The circus in 1957 will carry 20 elephants and about 70 horses, all in six cars. It will play indoors from 18 to 20 weeks and outdoors not under canvas, before grandstands."

"The expense under canvas with a private train, commissary and cooks was about \$175,000 a week. Arthur Concello, the new boss, a reformed trapeze man, was called in to help after the disaster of last summer. He had

been the head man some years ago but had a fight with John Ringling North and quit. He could afford to, for he had been the privilege man and had accumulated wealth. He estimates that by getting out of the hotel business, as he put it, and playing at least five days and usually a week between jumps he can cut the weekly expense to \$50,000."

In October 1956 a number of circus fans traveled to Utica, New York to see the Shrine show. This was always a good performance and there was an even larger group visiting that day because Merle Evans had the band and Harry Thomas was the ringmaster. From the Ringling performance came the Rebertes acrobats and Miss Mara, the center ring trapeze aerialist. The group talked about the musical score on the Ringling show in Merle's absence and how they had never before seen dancing in the backyard of the big show. Harry Thomas told how he had announced for the reopened Beatty show when it played in his home town in Texas. There was much talk about the the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey show's future endeavor and the plans if any for the reopened Beatty railroad circus.

During my time on the 1956 Ringling-Barnum circus, because of the late



Gorilla cage wagons in Sarasota in the late summer of 1956. Turner photo.

arrivals there was always a very long wait for show time. Individuals would have plenty of time to jackpot. A ticket seller once asked me if I liked the circus so much why didn't I join out. I replied that it was really only a hobby, but that I was very interested in it. With him it was a job! Through the years I have at times sampled the task of loading chairs and poles, experienced the dirt falling on my head from the bibles and during a short audition in the ring I gave up a career in show business while straddling a rosinback horse. In all my life I have never experienced and witnessed such hard work as I had while with the circus.

It was now late fall of 1956 and circus historians were busy comparing the it to the 1938 season. The various circuses I visited and my close association with the "Greatest Show on Earth" in 1956 was a grand and glorious experience. I got a first hand taste of the circus moving in its last days under canvas. It was at times a mountainous task and I witnessed the heartbreaks that occurred. But I would not trade that year for any other.

## CIRCUS REPORT

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# The Rise and Fall of a New Show in 1965 and 1966 Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus

By Jack S. Smith and Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

Following his graduation from high school in Dayton, Ohio in 1938, Jack S. Smith signed on as a lithographer for Verne A. Williams, advance advertising car manager of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, staying with the show until it closed in California. In 1939 Williams moved to Cole Bros. Circus where Smith followed him, again as a lithographer on the advance car. He continued on the advance in 1940. In 1941 he was part of the front door crew on the Cole show until he was drafted into the Army. Smith was again on the Cole advance car from 1943 to 1945. He returned to the show in 1946 where he remained until the end of the 1949 season.

In 1950 Smith joined the new Biller Bros. Circus. In the late 1950s he was with the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus in various positions.

While on the Kelly-Miller show Smith became acquainted with Dallas O. Snow, a teenager working in the side show canvas department. In 1958 Snow became Smith's protege. Smith later purchased three seals who were trained by Harry Rooks. Snow presented the act on indoor shows during the winter of 1960-1961. Smith and Snow

Owner Jack S. Smith posed in front of the ticket wagon of the 1965 show. Photo by Tommie Randolph.



were later with Jack Moore's Carson & Barnes and the Cristiani-Wallace Bros. circuses. Moving to Sarasota, Snow's seal act played the Circus Hall of Fame during the winter of 1961-1962.

Early in 1962 Snow suggested the organization of a circus to play shopping centers, and he and Jack Smith began planning such an outfit. During the summer of 1962 the basic idea and format of a show that was to become Robbins Bros World Toured Circus was laid out. Dallas O. Snow did not live to see the organization of the circus. He was killed in a train truck accident on September 24, 1962 in Sarasota. Smith went to work as office manager of the Art B. Thomas carnival in South Dakota with whom he remained through 1964.

During the off season Smith continued his plans for a circus. The Coastal Circus Operating Company was organized as the holding company for the new show. By March of 1963 Smith had selected the Robbins title.

It was a much used title. The Robbins name had first been used in 1871 by Burr Robbins who toured a circus out of Wisconsin until 1888. The Frank A. Robbins Circus operated from 1881 until 1891, in 1898, and from 1905 through 1915. From 1924 until 1931 Fred Buchanan called his circus Robbins Bros.

Sam B. Dill selected the Robbins name in the middle of the 1931 season after he was restricted from further use of the Gentry title he had used in 1930 on a large truck show. Dill called his show Old Reliable Robbins, but changed it to the Sam B. Dill Circus late in the season. In 1934 James Heron used the title Famous Robbins on his circus. Heron continued using the Famous Robbins title through the early part of the 1938 season.

Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell selected the Robbins Bros. title for their new 15 car show in 1938. When Adkins and Terrell's Cole Bros. Circus closed in 1938 they took Clyde Beatty and some additional cars to the Robbins show and

OFFICIAL ROUTE CARD			
ROBBINS BROS. CIRCUS			
PERMANENT ADDRESS: HUGO, OKLAHOMA			
NO. 1			
Apr. 9	Hugo (Nite only)	Oklahoma	00
Apr. 10	Hugo	Oklahoma	00
Apr. 11	Sunday		
Apr. 12	Sherman	Texas	83
Apr. 13	Denton	Texas	50
Apr. 14	Dallas	Texas	50
Apr. 15	Dallas	Texas	
Apr. 16	Dallas	Texas	
Apr. 17	Dallas	Texas	

The 1965 Robbins Bros. Circus route cards used the same design as those of the 1938 version. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise noted.

changed the name to Famous Robbins for a fall tour of the South.

Floyd King had suggested the Robbins title to Adkins and Terrell. In 1939 and 1940 King operated a merchant's street circus that he called Robbins Bros. During the 1944 season a circus out of Valdosta, Georgia used the Robbins Bros. name. The last use of the Robbins title prior to Smith's selection of the name was in 1949 when Bob Bonham Stevens ran into legal troubles with his Bailey Bros. show and leased the equipment to C. C. Smith, his office manager. In 1949 the Stevens show was called Robbins Bros. Circus.

Jack Smith conducted a search of the registered names at the copyright office in Washington, D.C. and found no record of the Robbins name. He did not announce the title of his new show until he had been granted a trademark by the U. S. Trademark Office and Commissioner of Patents. Smith was aware of the arrangement between Milt Rob-



**THE SHOPPERS GUIDE**  
First Annual Tour - America's Finest and Newest  
**SHOPPING CENTER**  
**ATTRACTION**  
Robbins Bros. World Toured  
**CIRCUS**  
OFFERS  
YOUR ORGANIZATION  
A  
PROVEN MONEY MAKING  
AND  
SALES STIMULATING  
PROJECT!

Acme Show Print prepared this four page flyer as a mailer to shopping centers prior to the opening of the 1965 season. The illustrations were done by Forrest Freeland.

bins, son of Frank A., and Adkins and Terrell for use of the title on the 1938 show by which Robbins was awarded the position of side show manager. Smith understood that the Robbins name had been used once by Bob Stevens and that the title was in the possession of Charles Lentz, an insurance man, who may have foreclosed on the Stevens show. By legally registering the name Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus Smith felt he had full right to the use of the Robbins name.

In a March 14, 1963 letter to his friend Gus Taliaferro, a former associate on the Cole show who Smith hoped would be a partner in the new venture, Smith outlined his plans for the new show. He wrote: "I have planned a 70 or 80 foot big top with perhaps two 30 foot and one forty foot middles. This will give seating for 1,000 to 1,500. I plan a three ring affair, using a chair grandstand at least on the front side. I am thinking of a five piece band. I have not planned on a side show, since that would be unnecessary on a shopping center unit. I have thought about five or six cross cages with small animals for either the midway or in one round end of the top. The canvas spread would consist of a marquee and big top, plus concession tops (which can be obtained from the Pepsi Cola Company). Elaborating on this subject, the Pepsi Cola Company gave the United Nations

Circus one hell of a deal. Concession tops, uniforms for butchers, \$35.00 per day for an ad over the bandstand and an ad in the coloring book (program), plus the fact that they paid U. S. Tent and Awning Company \$3,000.00 toward the cost of their 1963 big top. This was done because of Coca Cola. Coke had offered the show tops, etc., plus \$500.00 for the season's business.

"Now, as to the midway--I planned on just what you mentioned, No. 1 stand-grease joint-No. 2 stand novelties. I did not plan a pony ride as around the centers these things gross a little money. THERE WILL BE ABSOLUTELY NO MECHANICAL RIDES OR OTHER JUNK. IT JUST WON'T GET IT AROUND THESE BIG SHOPPING CENTERS.

"I sent for a copy of the 1963 Directory of Shopping Centers all over the country, which lists better than 7,500 centers plus about 8,000 promotional managers for these centers. I am also getting a listing of Chambers of Commerce. From this we can send out a circular requesting names and addresses of potential sponsors for each city.

"Here is another advantage of a shopping center deal. About all we have to furnish is the billing for the center and the immediate area. We furnish the ad mats for our ads which they in turn pay for and run in their store ads. They also agree to run one full page of advertising just the week ahead of the engagement. We will furnish them with discount tickets to be distributed by the

The 1965 coloring book and program with a full color cover.



merchants and in turn will pay the association in the center a percentage of the gross. They will in turn furnish us with the location, water and licences.

"I fully believe that the show can be operated right and on a minimum nut, which is the important thing and with the minimum amount of equipment and people.

"I have been watching the progress of the new United Nations Circus now being framed. They are already booked solid into August with all good sponsors.

"I plan to be on the road for at least twenty weeks this season. I have a carnie (office) wagon job lined up with the Art B. Thomas Shows.

"Now as to running any ads. No ads of any sort will be run until the corporation is formed--the title is registered and the copyrights are received as approved. It will best to have mail come to you. The operating company has a box at Hugo, but in order to throw off suspicion I do not want it to come to Hugo, Bradenton or Sarasota.

"I will advise you of everything that is going on in respect to this thing and just as soon as prices on the main items are received, will send them on to you. I still believe we can frame it for \$20,000. I have worked hard on this thing and it actually started last summer, before Dallas died. However until just recently I did not have the pep it took to pick up and get going on it. I believe the agent that I am in contact with is one of the finest in the country, insofar as shopping centers are concerned. What ever he has to be paid, he is worth it. I watched him in less than five years make Eddie Billetti, with Animal Land, U. S. A., a rich man with five lousy cage wagons, three concessions, two pony rides and two elephant rides. He put Billetti into some of the finest shopping centers in the east for an average of 35 weeks per year."

On October 29, 1963 Smith wrote to Bernie Mendelson, of the O'Henry Tent and Awing Co., in Chicago, Illinois. In this letter he outlined the canvas needs for the new circus. Smith wrote: "In regards to a top, I have noted your prices, as quoted to Gus Taliaferro for the 70 and the 80 foot round tops, bale ring style. I would very much like to have a royal blue top trimmed in orange. The sidewall--orange and blue stripes--the marquee--royal blue with orange trim and an orange "T" curtain. I have not determined the height of the wall as yet and hope that you can advise on this.





This Robbins elephant bill was an Erie design used in 1938 and copied for the 1965 show by Acme Show Print.

"The plans for this show are more or less along the European style in that we contemplate on operating only one ring and one stage. One 80 foot round end will be used as a dressing area as per the diagram and will be separated from the main show area by a canvas wall. We are planning on seating on both sides and on one round end. By my calculations, the top should seat around 1200 people."

On November 9, 1963 Smith wrote to Taliaferro: "I have been in contact with the Coca Cola Company relative to the tie-in. I have also written to the Pepsi Cola Company. I received a reply today from Coca Cola and they seem interested. I believe that Pepsi is a bigger spender so want to wait until I hear from them."

"I am going to write to the John Fabick Company in St. Louis regarding either a 30 or 60 KW light plant. Also plan to contact Johnny Canole in Miami in reference to trucks."

"I have been in contact with Doc Bartok several times. In the main I want to feel him out, since he has quite a bit of equipment, two elephants, liberty horse act and pony drill all laying idle at his quarters here. He has two semis, several straight trucks, a stake driver and water wagon and about the only thing he lacks is seats."

"I have not as yet incorporated the operating company as I did not want to attempt this while on the road with the carnival. This will be a Delaware corporation. I definitely feel there should be an operating company or a holding company behind the show. It will take three people to incorporate. Incorporation fees, if they have not been raised, stand at \$168.00 and this includes charter, books, seal, etc."

"I have had a lot of response to the ad--all agents and performers. However, I don't know nor have I heard of most of them."

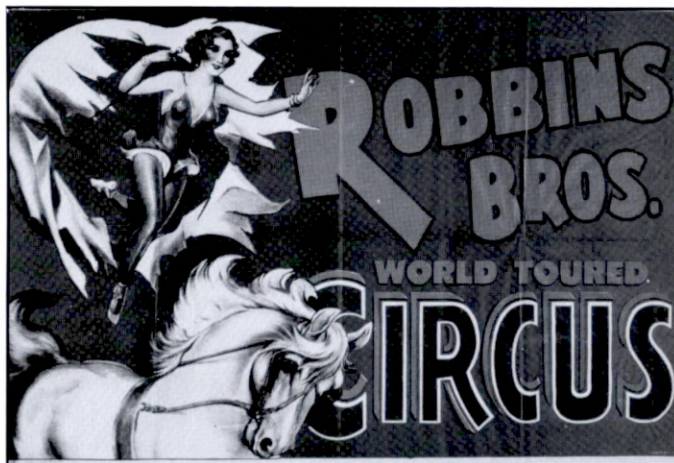
On November 13, 1963 Smith again wrote to Taliaferro: "I had a letter from Bundy Olds in St. Louis regarding trucks. They require 1/3 down with the balance in two seasons and \$20.00 monthly payments on each unit during the winter."

"I don't figure to have many semi units, but will use three straight trucks. I think the whole show can be hauled on six trucks if it is loaded right. I still feel the show can be put out for 20 to 25 thousand initial outlay. This depends on finance situation with the tent company, power plant company and for trucks. Those three items should be financed as you know for the first year. Props, poles, seats and other items can be paid for as we buy them."

"I feel that you, Rita [Mrs. Taliaferro], myself and my father can incorporate the operating company figuring on 2500 shares of no-par value at \$100.00 per share or an initial \$25,000.00 capital investment. I am set at the Hugo banks to borrow upwards of \$15,000.00 and I believe the bank there will go along with me on this."

"I would like to be able to shoot an agent out of here in January either for shopping centers or for small towns on a one day basis. I don't want to go into Hugo to build it if I can help it. But coming out of Sarasota you can starve to death for 30 days. I saw what the United Nations show did this spring and I don't want any of that."

By the end of December 1963 Smith had continued to try to work out a deal with Doc Bartok with no success. Smith wrote to Taliaferro on December 20 saying: "I guess I will lay all of my plans aside for another year and look for something else for the coming season."



This poster used in 1965 was copied by Acme from one used by Ringling-Barnum in the 1930s.

Smith was back on the Art B. Thomas Shows for the 1964 season. During the year he continued to plan for his shopping center circus. Contacts were made with various shopping center chains and he was greatly impressed at the interest in such a show.

Smith had become ill with pneumonia while on the Thomas carnival in the early fall of 1964. He went to Hugo, Oklahoma and spent two weeks in the hospital. After recovering he visited with D. R. Miller and discussed the idea of the shopping center circus. He told Miller he had dropped the project due to lack of funds. Miller later agreed to go in on the deal for 50% providing Smith could book a route with bonafide contracts. Smith accepted Miller's proposition on the fifty percent ownership. Miller made no financial investment but was to contribute various items of equipment and animals that were surplus from the Kelly-Miller show.

Jack B. Arnott was hired as general agent. The wheels were set in motion after a route for the 1965 season was planned. Brochures and other materials were printed and mailed to shopping centers fully explaining the entire operation. The response to the mailings was surprisingly good. Mrs. Elizabeth Arnott worked closely with Smith in the office during the planning and organizing of the show. Smith credits both Arnotts with providing extensive experience in the planning and framing of the circus. Up to that point no announcement had been made regarding the title of the new circus. Following complete and thorough research of the Robbins name the Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus was registered at the patent, trademark and copyright office in Washington, D.C.



Prior to the official opening of the winter quarters D. R. Miller withdrew from the partnership because Smith was not willing to give him the concessions.

Jim Hoffman, owner of the Acme Show Printing Company, made an in kind investment in the circus. Hoffman contributed all of the printing. Smith provided other funds and a bank in Hugo loaned the show \$5,000.00.

A full staff was engaged for the advance under the direction of Jack Arnett. Veteran press agent Eddie Howe was employed to prepare Robbins newspaper releases from his home in Anaheim, California. Harry B. Chipman was hired as a consultant to design the newspaper ads.

On January 9, 1965 the winter quarters was officially opened in Hogo. The building of the show was under the direction of Lee Bradley and his assistant Thomas Spence. Plans were made for the purchase of the major equipment.

It was Smith's intention to follow the design and colors of the big top of the Cole Bros. Circus. O'Henry Tent and Awning had supplied the tents for the Cole show.

An order was placed with O'Henry in Chicago. The complete order called for the following items:

1-Indigo blue ninety foot round top with three forty foot middles, fireproof treated and complete with chafing bags. \$7,716.00.

6-Sections of 10 foot side wall, indigo blue and royal orange striped. \$1,350.00.

1-Twenty by thirty foot marquee, blue and orange, with chafing bag. \$650.00

1-Royal blue main entrance tee curtain, complete with lettering and chafing bag. \$166.00.

1-Proscenium curtain for big top, 90 by 20 feet complete with chafing bag. \$585.00.

2-Sets of back door curtains complete with steel rings. \$40.00.

6-Sections of 3 by 35 foot canvas seat curtains for reserve seat sections and connections, blue and orange. \$320.00.

6-Sections of seat and entrance netting, white with red trim. \$180.00.

The total O'Henry order was \$11,007.00. A lease dated March 17, 1965 was drawn by the O'Henry firm and the show which called for weekly

payments of \$185.00. Other big top rigging equipment including ropes, steel cable, blocks and center pole flag-staffs cost an additional \$1,633.00.

Five 35 foot by 8 inch aluminum center poles cost \$1,000.00. Twenty-six 20 foot by 5 inch aluminum quarter poles cost \$1,000.00 and eighty-six 10 foot by 3 inch wood side poles with top pins and rings cost \$145.00. An additional \$1,500 was spent for iron and wood stakes, steel layout pins, bally cloths and extra coils of rope.

A cash register, ticket exchange desk, gate railings and bally cloths for the marquee cost \$348.00.

Motor equipment was ordered from

1-1959 Chevrolet tractor complete with saddle tanks. Cost \$1,115.00.

1-1959 Chevrolet tractor complete with saddle tanks. Cost \$1,115.00.

1-1955 Chevrolet tractor complete with saddle tanks. Cost \$650.00. Purchased from Moore Equipment Company, formerly on Carson & Barnes Circus.

1-1960 Dodge walk-in van, used as advance billing truck. Cost \$1,100.00.

1-1962 U. S. Army Jeep, complete with stake driver. Cost \$1,000.00.

The total investment in motorized equipment was \$12,460.00.

The total cost of electrical equipment was \$8,102.00. Included were the following:

1-Stewart and Stevenson fifty KW generator, powered by General Motors diesel engine. Cost \$5,442.00.

1-Two hundred gallon fuel tank for generator. Cost \$205.00.

8-Twelve foot goose-necked lights for connection and marquee. Cost \$100.00.

4-Twelve foot goose-necked lights with twelve inch reflectors. Cost \$70.00.

1-Complete set of twelve seal beam lights on metal frame for midway lighting and installed on roof of ticket wagon. Cost \$145.00.

1-Complete set of six seal beam lights on metal frame. Installed on roof of light plant truck and used for tear down. Cost \$95.00.

1-Trouper spot light, 1500 watt, complete with lamp and case. Cost \$190.00.

1-Thirty-six inch wash tub center ring light. Cost \$20.00.

2-Twenty-four by twenty-four inch lights for rings one and three. Cost \$80.00.

1-Fifty amp circuit breaker box complete. Cost \$180.00.

1-Portable electrical control box for big top light system. Cost \$100.00.

1-Complete sound system for big top. Cost \$300.00.

A total of \$5,120.00 was spent for seating. Included were the following:

1,000 wood folding chairs for grandstand, purchased from the Lone Star Seating Company San Antonio, Texas. Cost \$2,550.00.

46-Seven by sixteen feet grandstand string risers. Cost \$400.00.

140-Grandstand chair platforms, twelve foot by one inch by twenty-seven inches. Cost \$800.00.



The Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus on the lot in Dallas, Texas in 1965. The big top had only been up four times when this photo was taken. Tommie Randolph photo.

Bundy Motor Sales Company in St. Louis, Missouri. The following units were delivered by Bundy:

1-1951 thirty-two foot Fruehauf semi dropped frame furniture van, used as office-ticket wagon and sleeper. Truck No. 50. Cost \$1,600.00.

1-1952 Trailmobile thirty foot semi van. Cut down and reframed to carry poles, canvas equipment and rigging. Truck No. 40. Cost \$1,800.00.

1-1948 thirty foot Fruehauf semi van, framed to carry complete electrical department, generator and grandstand chairs. Truck No. 20. Cost \$936.00.

1-1955 thirty foot Fruehauf stock van, framed to carry seat lumber. Purchased from Moore Equipment Co., formerly on Carson & Barnes Circus. Truck No. 30. Cost \$600.00.

1-1960 Chevrolet twelve foot van body with hydraulic tail gate lift. Carried grandstand chairs. Truck No. 10. Cost \$1,429.00.

1-1959 Chevrolet tractor complete with saddle tanks. Cost \$1,115.00.





The 1965 marquee was orange and blue. The ticket box on right was for a pit show. Tommie Randolph photo.

46-Scissor jacks, type A, five feet high., for grandstand. Cost \$200.00.

46-Scissor jacks, type B, four feet high, for grandstand. Cost \$200.00.

46-Scissor jacks, type C, two feet high, for grandstand. Cost \$200.00.

28-Bleacher stringer risers, eight high by sixteen feet. Cost \$200.00.

96-Bleacher board seats, one inch by eight inches by twelve feet. Cost \$280.00.

28-Scissor jacks, type A, for bleacher seats, five feet high. Cost \$100.00.

28-Scissor jacks, type B, for bleacher seats, four feet high. Cost \$100.00.

28-Scissor jacks, type C for bleacher seats, two feet high. Cost. \$100.00.

80-Eighteen feet long seat safety chains for grandstand. Cost \$130.00.

Progress on the building of the new show continued. Contracts and various other printed material containing the Robbins name were prepared.

On January 30, 1965 Smith brought Taliaferro up to date on the progress in readying the show. He wrote: "Don't believe I mentioned it, but I am in this thing alone. Dorie backed out several days ago. I am however using some of his equipment. Most equipment will be new. I am getting or supposed to get three elephants off him plus a pony drill and several trucks. In the main I've bought a lot of stuff.

"I have hired the following acts: Capt. Frank Simpson (a new cage act never before on the road), Gerard Soules with plate spinning; Caesar Benedicto, slack wire and juggler from Europe; Evy Karoly, bareback, dressage, liberty act; Great Dion aerial cloud swing; The Fantastic Star Shooters, a space age finale

and five clowns. I still need a couple of filler acts.

"I have hired my boss canvasman, but am short an electrician. Need a 24 hour man. I have leased my concessions to Ione Stevens. I am for the first year going to lease the pony ride and pit show out as I cannot afford to frame them myself. I am sweating out the money angle on this at present and have made arrangements to borrow \$20,000.00 from the banks here. Don't know if I will or not. Thus far I have over \$10,000.00 cash in this thing."

Late in February of 1965 Arthur Miller, general agent of the Kelly-Miller show, accompanied by Milton Robbins appeared in the Hugo office of the show. At this point Milton Robbins announced that he and his family were the owners of the Robbins Bros. title and that unless a lease of the title was drawn between his family and the show at a cost of \$100.00 per day, the title could not be used. A hassle ensued. Official papers indicating incorporation of the show and registration of the title were produced by Smith for Robbins inspection. The end result was the request that Milt Robbins leave the office of Robbins Bros. Circus, Inc. and proceed legally if it was his intention to claim ownership of the title of the show. Shortly thereafter it became

Cover of a four page courier printed by Acme Show Print for the 1965 tour.



known that Milt Robbins had been contacted at his home in Clearwater, Florida, by Art Miller and transported by Miller to Hugo in an attempt to thwart the use of the title by the new show. It was clear that the Hugo show owners did not take kindly to another circus on the road.

By March 1, with the opening only six weeks off, the winter quarters were in full swing with the arrival of the new equipment. The trucks and semis were painted orange to match the big top, and were lettered attractively. The advance department was progressing at an accelerated pace and the shopping center route was shaping up.

Staffing of the show continued. Jack Arnott hired Charlie Campbell as contractor. Robert Bullock was engaged as contracting press agent. Phillip Marcus was hired to head the advance advertising department that was to have four lithographers and billposters.

The Acme Show Printing Company of Hugo was given an order for a new line of paper. Fred D. Pfening, Jr. provided Acme with a number of lithographs from former shows. Many of these old designs were reproduced by Acme in full color using the Robbins Bros. title. Acme also sold the copied designs to the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros., King Bros and Kelly-Miller circuses in 1965.

Thomas R. Stevens was employed as 24 hour man. Grace Hoffman was placed in charge of a national advertising program. Thomas F. Spence was named boss canvasman. Allen Carter was hired as chief electrician and his wife Elizabeth was hired as front door superintendent and purchasing agent. Donald Bas-ham was hired as assistant manager, director of performing personnel and big show announcer.

On March 9, 1965 the Coastal Circus Operating Company was officially incorporated in the state of Delaware. However the first meeting of the board of directors was not held until March 19th.

In a March 17, 1965 letter to Gus Taliaferro Smith provided information on additional financial help. He wrote: "In regard to concessions. I have booked Ione Stevens, she is the only one from any show that I would trust. She has spent over \$10,000.00 to put a front end on the show for me. This includes her concessions (all new equipment), one 55 foot pit show (new), one 22 foot pit show (new) and a live pony ride. I just did not have the money to go ahead on this myself. I have right at \$40,000.00 invested in this operation so far and more yet to spend--so trust you see what I am up against.



"I have added a concert. I also have a very good performance lined up--using an organ--no band. Since this is a shopping center operation I cannot put a show cookhouse on it. I will probably have all I can handle with the health departments the way it is.

"I have taken nothing in the way of cash or equipment or animals from D. R. Miller."

As the opening day grew closer additional acts were announced.

They included: Frank Dean, liberty ponies and wild west; Bernice Dean, menage and specialty numbers; Max Craig and his comedy chimps; Dempsey Condon to work a liberty act; Hugo Marquardt, juggler; Barbers, aerial bars; Augillars, perch act; Los Amigos, rolling globes and the Fredonia Troupe of acrobats. Lou Walton was hired as producing clown, plus Marjorie and Bob Langin and Tim Conway. Leona Hill was engaged as musical director.

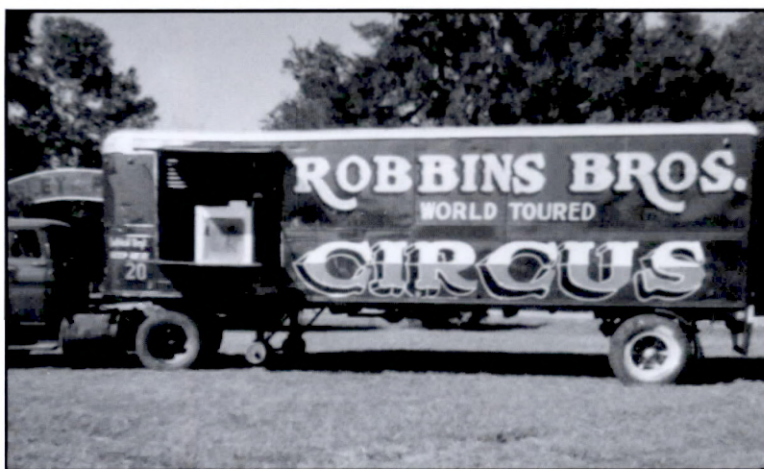
Additional staff appointments included Thomas F. Spence, general superintendent and Lee Bradley, superintendent of construction.

The motorized equipment arrived in February and was reframed by the Cearly Machine Shop in downtown Hugo. After the chairs arrived they were painted a bright yellow. In just over three months the show had been built and was ready for the April 9 opening in Hugo.

On April 5, 1965 a special meeting of the board of directors of the Coastal Circus Operating Company was held in Hugo. Present were Jack S. Smith and James W. Hoffman, a majority of the members of the board. The only motion made ordered that all equipment purchased and owned by the corporation be leased to the operators of Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus for their opening on April 9, 1965.

A recapitulation of equipment value based on purchase and cost of rebuilding was as follows:

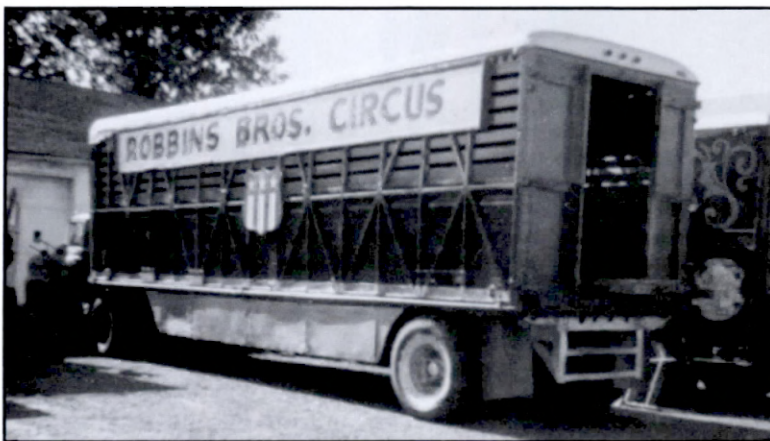
Big top rigging equipment.	\$1,633.00
Big top main entrance equipment.	348.00



In 1965 the light plant and grandstand chairs were carried in semi No. 20. Jack Smith collection.

Ticket department equipment	133.00
Property department equipment	
	1,560.00
Woodworking, shop and paint department.	245.00
Lot layout department.	120.00
Road office equipment.	784.00
Tents and canvas equipment	
	11,007.00
Electrical department equipment.	
	8,102.00
Poles and pole equipment.	2,145.00
Miscellaneous and sundry equipment.	
	1,500.00
Motor equipment, trucks and trailers.	
	12,460.00
Seating equipment.	5,120.00
Total equipment cost.	\$45,157.00
The lease was signed dated April 7, 1965 covered all equipment owned by the Coastal Circus Operating Company.	

Lumber truck No. 30 was purchased from the Carson & Barnes Circus. The trucks were painted orange with Robbins Bros. in silver and Circus in white and gold. Jack Smith collection.



The circus was to pay as rent the sum of thirty thousand dollars, at the rate of one thousand dollars per week. The lease was signed by John W. Hoffman as vice president of the Coastal Circus Operating Company and Jack S. Smith as manager of the circus.

There was a delay in the opening day due to the all new canvas and equipment. The show's help was somewhat inexperienced in the handling of a bale ring top as all previous Hugo shows had used

push pole tops.

The show was moved to Hugo's Choctaw County Fairgrounds for the opening on April 9 and 10. A full dress rehearsal was held the afternoon of the 9th. The performance ran two and one half hours. It was trimmed to a running time of ninety minutes. The doors opened promptly at 7:00 P.M. and by 8:00 all 2300 seats in the big top were filled. Honored guests at the opening performance included Mr. and Mrs. Obert Miller, Mr. and Mrs. D. R. Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Moore, Mr. and Mrs. Herb Walters and many other circus personnel from Hugo. The show was delayed until 8:30 to allow for the introduction of the guests. The show concluded at 10:30. Problems were encountered in tearing down the big top. There was no stake puller and no elephant to perform the job. By 1:30 A.M. the big top was on the ground. The dropping of the top was slow due to the new ropes and rigging. D. R. Miller had remained on the lot to see the tear down. Seeing the problem Miller sent a man to the Kelly-Miller winter quarters for an elephant to pull the stakes. The equipment left in a convoy at 9 A.M. the next morning. The Kelly-Miller work elephant and truck was sent on with the show.

April 11 was an open date to allow the show to travel to Sherman, Texas on the 12th. Denton, Texas was shown on the 13th. The first two days on the road produced good business.

A day was taken to move to Dallas, Texas for the first shopping center date of April 15 to 17. Advance promotion by the Walnut Hills Shopping Center during the three weeks prior



to the show's arrival had been excellent, with both the circus and center promotional people working together. The circus distributed a large number of four page flyers through the center merchants.

The 4:00 matinee performance drew a three quarter house. The concessions drew good business.

One hour prior to door time for the night show the Dallas police delivered an emergency tornado warning. The night show was cancelled immediately and the big top centers were dropped. By 10:00 P.M. the tornado threats were over and the rain subsided. The big top was raised and the props were placed back in the tent. Business was generally good during the three days.

The show moved to Wichita Falls on April 19 for a three day shopping center date. The show had laid off a day to travel to Wichita Falls and the center poles were erected but the big top had been wind-rolled and was to be raised the following day. Unknown to the boss canvasman and Smith, Gerard Soules made the decision to raise the top on Sunday evening using only the tear down lights on the roof of the light plant truck. The top had been raised and the quarter poles were being put into place using the Kelly-Miller work elephant when the wind gusted considerably which spooked the elephant who was hooked to a quarter pole. The end result was the ripping of the canvas along the lace lines on the round end. The top required extensive sewing the following morning. Smith was away at the time and when notified of the damage he went to the lot to survey the damage and found no one in charge of the big top. After seeing the damage Smith advised Soules that his services were no longer needed.

During the night show on April 19 Don Basham fell while performing his cloud swing. He dropped approximately 30 feet to the asphalt parking lot and was taken to the Wichita Falls General Hospital for treatment of a fractured leg and broken ankle. He returned to his home in Ft. Worth, Texas.

The show moved to Lawton, Oklahoma for a two day stand starting April 23rd. Duncan, Oklahoma was played on the 26th, Chickasha on the 27th, Norman on the 28th and 29th, Shawnee on the 30th, Seminole May 1, McAlister the 3rd, and Muskogee on the 4th. Dur-

ing this time the weather remained good but attendance dropped off on the one day stands.

Norman, Oklahoma had always been considered a good circus town and though well billed and publicised business was disappointing.

After several hurried meetings with the advance staff, the decision was made to close the season at Sapulpa, Oklahoma on May 5 and return the equipment to winter quarters in Hugo in an effort to obtain fresh money from various investors. The show had booked a solid route of thirty-three weeks prior to the untimely closing. It was believed at the time that the circus would encounter several weeks of mediocre business before getting to other shopping centers. Towns had been contracted through July 7 in Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio. Shopping center dates were booked in Fort Smith, Little Rock and Hot Springs, Arkansas; Memphis and Donaldson, Tennessee; Henderson, Owensboro and Louisville, Kentucky; Cincinnati, Middletown, Columbus and Dayton, Ohio; and Richmond, Anderson, Indianapolis and Muncie, Indiana. Contracting was discontinued at Muncie on the date the show closed.

The Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus had closed by the time an article, written by Tommie Randolph, appeared in the May 8, 1965 *Amusement Business*. The article read as follows: "Robbins Bros. Circus opened its inaugural season April 9 in Hugo, Oklahoma, where it was built all-new since late January. According to general manager Jack Smith, plans are to play shopping centers exclusively. Some 33 weeks of bookings were noted before

Semi No. 40 carried the poles and canvas. The tractors were painted blue. Jack Smith collection.



the circus hit the road to Dallas the first week, with only 30 one day stands on the route.

"Performance is given in a new royal blue big top trimmed in orange from O'Henry Tent & Awing--a 90 foot round with three 40 foot middles and a 20 by 30 foot marquee. Seating is a 7 high grandstand with 12 sections of folding chairs plus 8-high blues circling the front end. Back end is cut off with a 20 foot proscenium wall, giving a dressing room and pad room in the big top, compact for shopping center parking areas.

"Donnie and Ione McIntosh have the entire front end, with everything built from scratch. Included are a 55 foot animal pit show (alligators, snakes, lizards, jungle rats), a 22 foot freak animal show (tapir), a live pony sweep and conventional center stands. They also handle concessions in the big top.

"Robbins was the first traditional tented circus to visit Dallas in twenty years when it set up April 14 for a four day engagement at Walnut Hill Shopping Village. It moved into Dallas from a Tuesday night (13) show in Denton, Texas."

A financial statement was drawn covering the period from January 1 to May 5; \$3,656.51 had been expended by the advance department and \$1,479.16 had been used on office and administrative expenses,

Road income was as follows:

General admissions	4,066.55
Tax and service charges	68.40
Reserved seats	561.25
Wild west concert	4.25
Concession percentage	203.70
Pit show percentage	131.41
National advertising (Coca Cola)	250.00
Other income	58.95
Total income	\$5,344.51

The road expenses were as follows:

Advance department, expense and salaries

	802.37
Lot and licences	655.59
Salaries	2,261.98
Cookhouse expense	57.59
Gas, oil and repairs	294.92
Feed, horses	43.45
Office and administrative	192.25
Lights, fuel and repairs	220.40
Animal feed, meat	85.30
Concession department	75.00



Other purchases 233.92  
 Dining car meals, labor 82.58  
 Other expenses 339.06  
 Total expense \$5,344.51

It is interesting to note that no expense was listed on the road or during the winter for advertising posters. Jim Hoffman contributed the posters as an in kind investment.

The road income and expense were exactly the same. The financial statement may have been drawn this way for tax purposes. Although it is not shown in the financial statement the concessions department out-grossed the big show during the short tour. In shopping centers the concessions opened at 10:00 A.M. and ran continuously until 11:00 P.M. This large gross was a surprise to Ione Stevens who had customarily been used to only a few hours play daily on a regular one day stand circus.

After the show arrived in Hugo it was stored in the Kelly-Miller winter quarters. All stops were pulled to obtain the fresh money needed in order that the show could complete its route. Smith also prepared an equipment listing dated May 17, 1965. The total value of the equipment listed was \$33,662.62. The equipment was offered for sale in whole or in part, or the entire show was available under a lease.

By June 1 most of the performing personnel and the staff had drifted to other shows seeking employment. The 1955 Chevrolet tractor which had come from Jack Moore's Carson & Barnes circus was returned. The 1960 Dodge walk-in van that had been used as an advance truck was sold to Baggett Motors in Hugo. The Chevrolet chair truck with a 12 foot van body and hydraulic lift tailgate was also sold.

A few weeks after the show returned to Hugo Jack Smith received a late night call from Johnnie Marietta, a circus fan living in Pittsburg, Kansas. Marietta advised Smith that he felt he could assist in locating a financial backer and that he would have the gentleman call him. Smith received a call from Alex J. Irwin, a circus fan living in Keokuk, Iowa. Smith and Irwin discussed the needs of the show for a hour. Shortly there after Irwin sent Smith a check for \$3,100.00. At no time during their relationship did Smith and Irwin meet in person.

Continuing to keep Gus Taliaferro informed Smith wrote on June 17, 1965:



This dropped-frame semi No. 50 was used as a ticket wagon and sleeper. Jack Smith collection.

"I am making very effort to put a show together at this time. However I am having no luck as usual. Response to the ad has been very light. (Neal) Burke left here yesterday for Phoenix and is going to try to set the town for July 3. Whether or not I can get a show together in that length of time remains to be seen.

"I have more guts than money. But this is a last ditch stand. A gentleman in Iowa has advanced about \$3,100.00 and of course this amount has helped some, but it only took care of current obligations. It has not given me sufficient money to get out of here to reopen. This person has money but he isn't going to cut loose with too much and he seems to think that he is going to get quite an interest in the show for his three thousand. But I am thinking otherwise.

"If I can get reopened and operating again, I want to clear this debt and if not he will receive stock in the company and that is about it.

"I have been very disgusted with this thing for the past several weeks and of I am course without funds. I am not overly enthused about the situation as it stands now. I would just as soon put the whole thing in storage if I had the money to keep the payments up on it rather than attempt a reorganization yet this season. But here again you cannot get anyone with sufficedient money to have any faith in you, and I cannot blame them. The show was out and folded after three weeks, so of course, no one wants to take a chance.

"I have tried them all--[Art] Concello, [Frank] McClosky, [Bill] English, [Jack] Mills and quite a few others and the funny part of it is you can't even get an answer from them so that shows their disinterest in the thing.

"The show is a beautiful thing and you can't even get anyone to come and take a look at it on the lot. I have offered to set the show up for any prospective buyers or angels

and I can't even get them to Hugo let alone anywhere else."

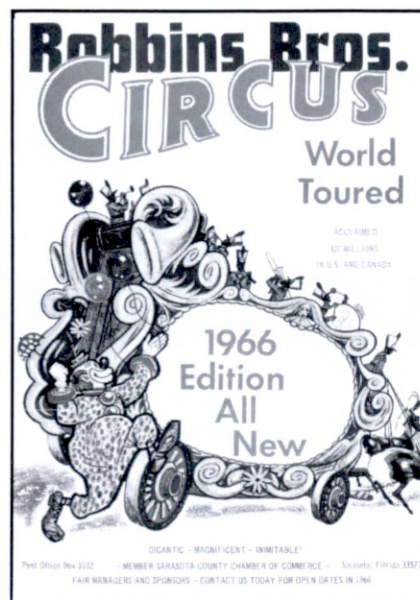
During the later part of June, Smith received several telephone calls from Floyd King and Frank McClosky indicating that the show should undertake bankruptcy and that the Acme Circus Operating Company would purchase the show in its entirety and

resume the route. The bankruptcy action was given serious consideration, however the show was not seriously indebted and there only remained \$7,000.00 in secured indebtedness. The bankruptcy route was not taken.

Following Alex Irwin's promise to continue financial assistance and help take the show out in 1966 it was agreed that the show should be moved from Hugo, Oklahoma to Smith's home in Bradenton, Florida. All of the remaining billing paper and other printed matter was removed from the Acme shelves and loaded into the office trailer. Late in July the show was moved to Bradenton and put into storage until a winter-quarters could be located in the area. An 11 acre plot with a storage building was found between the Sunshine Skyway and Palmetto at the intersection of routes 19 and 41 which became the winter quarters.

An office was established in Smith's home. Later in the summer he began looking for an agent and other staff people. An April 1966 date was set for

Full color cover of a four page flyer sent to sponsors in 1966.





the opening. The decision was made to change from shopping centers to straight phone promotion.

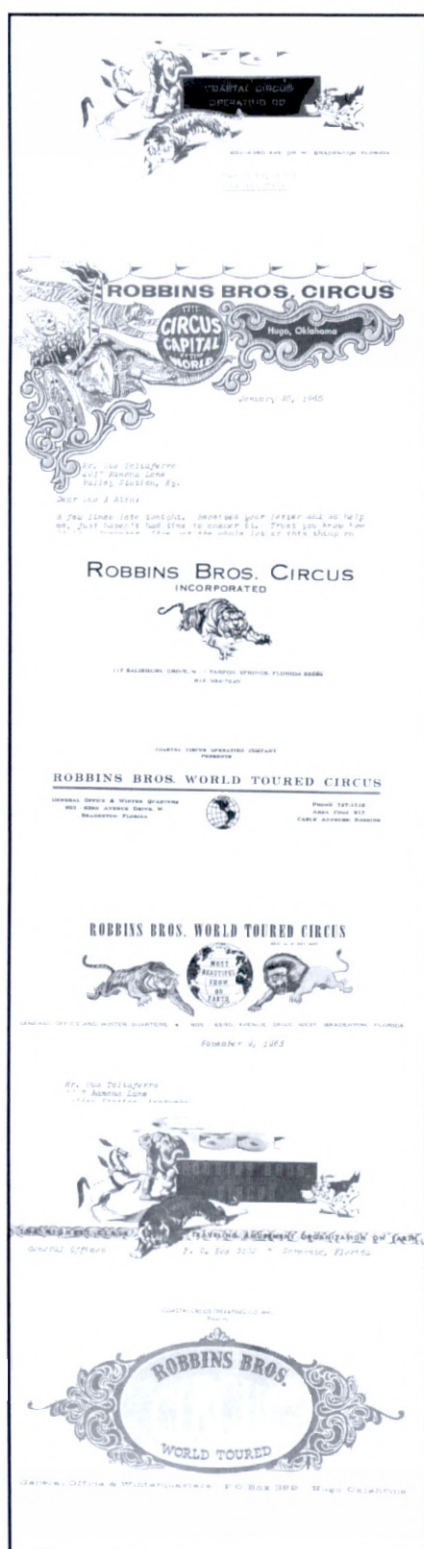
Smith met with Milton "Doc" Bartok about joining forces, with Bartok as agent. Bartok could enhance the Robbins operation with additional trucks, light plants and other needed equipment on a partnership basis. An agreement was suggested between Smith, Bartok and Alex Irwin and by late fall it appeared as though the show could refurbish, reframe and take the road early in 1966.

Charlie Campbell arrived in Bradenton after finishing the season with Cristiani-Wallace Bros. Circus. He was hired by Smith to assist in the reframing and to commence contracting at once for the 1966 season. Campbell suggested that a mailing be made to circus fans in an effort to raise cash. On September 24, 1965 Campbell made a large mailing to circus fans inviting them to purchase stock in Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus. The letter read: "POSITIVELY COMING--WAIT--THE ALL NEW-ROBBINS BROS. WORLD TOURED CIRCUS. We have 50 shares of stock now available at \$136.00 per share. We are also offering for sale--your own new individual grandstand chair. . . your name beautifully imprinted thereon . . . plus a 'steel die' engraved Life Time Pass . . . and membership certificate in the Robbins Bros. Circus Fan Club. Chair will be sent to you express paid at the end of the 1966 season ending in November.

"Remember . . . this is is an all new circus. . . the show that everyone said could not be built. We are complete in every detail and ready to roll and we open in February 1966. We are not trying to raise funds with which to build a circus. This show is complete and is known as the 'most beautiful show on earth' . . . everything new but the name." The letter was signed by Jack S. Smith, president and Charlie B. Campbell, general manager.

Campbell's "ding" letter brought in around \$1,500. A package of posters and other printed material was sent to each of the individuals who had responded. Nearly all of the Acme posters left from the 1965 tour were used.

This type of letter to circus fans was not new. It had been used by Charles (Hamburger Jack) Burslem in February of 1957. Burslem's letter carried the Sparks Circus title; however, he noted it was his intention to try to lease the name Sparks Circus from Ringling, but if that could not be done the title would be designated as Clark Bros. Circus. He asked for outright donations of \$10.00



For a show that toured such a short time Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus used a wide variety of letterheads.

or more. In May of 1957 Frank McClosky had sent a similar letter to circus fans on a Clyde Beatty Circus letterhead. However his letter only asked if the fan would be interested in

purchasing stock in the Beatty show.

Campbell left for South Florida in October, but by Thanksgiving he had been unable to set any towns under sponsorship. He was dismissed. Smith was later informed that while on his payroll Campbell had been contracting for another circus. During the month of December no one was on the road contracting.

When the show's equipment arrived in Bradenton it was in good condition and it was determined that little or no work would be needed during the winter. All of the tractors were sent to a body shop to be painted white. The semi that had carried the canvas, poles and rigging had turned out to be unhandy. The trailer was sent to the Miller Truck and Trailer Company in Bradenton to be rebuilt.

Early in January 1966 negotiations again were commenced with Doc Bartok, who agreed to take the job of general agent. Bartok's equipment was stored on his property in Oneco, just outside Sarasota. By merging the Bartok equipment with the Robbins plunder the show would gain another 60 KW light plant, a canvas spool truck, another stake driver, a water truck, cook-house and sleepers. Bartok's equipment appeared to be in good repair and would not need additional work.

Smith advanced \$800.00 to Bartok for traveling expenses and he hit the road on a contracting trip. Bartok had no more success than Charlie Campbell in setting sponsored dates for Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus. Smith and Bartok parted company and the Hoxie-Bardex equipment remained in Oneco.

An article appeared in the January 15, 1966 *Amusement Business* about Robbins Bros. It read: "Robbins Bros. Circus, out for a brief run last spring in the Southwest, will be all new for 1966, general manager Jack Smith reports from the show's new quarters near Palmetto, Florida.

"Smith, former auditor and treasurer for Kelly-Miller and on the executive staff of Hagenbeck-Wallace, Cole Bros. and Ringling Bros., has leased 10 acres with an option to buy. Several buildings are on the property, where all of the equipment and stock is housed. A new 120 foot banner line will front the side show operated by Dee Aldrich."

After having had two agents on the road with no success in booking a route Jack S. Smith began to wonder if he would open Robbins Bros. in the spring. Creditors were pressing him on bills from the ill-fated 1965 tour. Alex Irwin refused to supply more money. Smith was searching for an another in-



vestor, or a partner that could provide some help. He made contact with Paul Cristiani, former general agent of the Cristiani and Cristiani-Wallace Bros. circuses who become Smith's associate.

An agreement was drawn between Smith and Cristiani. The document stated that the two were to become co-operators of a traveling amusement company during the 1966 season. The new firm was to be called Robbins Bros. and/or Cristiani-Robbins Bros. Combined Circus and that every transaction conducted by either operator in behalf of the firm would be in the firm name. The equipment for the operation was to be leased from the Coastal Circus Operating Company, Inc., a holding corporation. The operators were to pay the holding company rental during the operating season. The profits of the business were to be shared with 40% to Jack S. Smith, 40% to Paul Cristiani and 20% to a reserve fund. Losses, if any, were to be shared equally by Smith and Cristiani. A stipulated salary was to be paid weekly to both parties. Any sums drawn by either operator over and above salary were to be charged to him and be treated as a part of his share in the profits of the operation. Either operator was not to engage in any business in competition with the firm during the life of the agreement. The agreement was to be known as a "pre-incorporation agreement and that a corporation be formed for the purpose of operating the enterprise. The incorporation was to take place within thirty days of May 21, 1966, the official opening of the 1966 operating season.

While the agreement was never signed by Smith and Cristiani, they proceeded. Cristiani began his effort in contracting dates for the circus. Charles Moyer was sent on the road to book dates. Following the signing of dates Cristiani sent phone promotion crews to each city.

Minor repairs were needed other than the rebuilding of the canvas and pole semi-trailer. The tractors were painted white. The semi-trailers were repainted red. Robbins Bros. was lettered in silver and Circus was in white and yellow. The semis were renumbered as follows: office truck No. 121, light plant No. 105, poles and canvas No. 251 and Props and seats No. 119.

Alex Irwin had earlier sent new electrical cable from Chicago and an electrical contractor in Sarasota revamped the entire power system. New promotional material was printed replacing the shopping center theme used in 1965.

The show was in desperate need of money so a single date was planned for

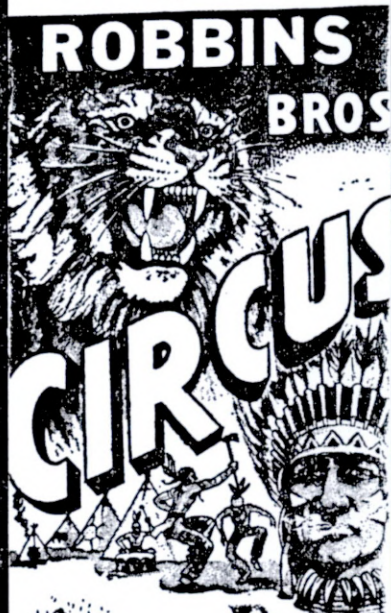
## SARASOTA ONE DAY FRI. 22 ONLY APRIL

Performance at 4-8 pm

At School Gr. on Fruitville Rd.

**Cardinal Mooney  
High School**

**Proudly Present**



—Now Greater Than Ever—

**SCORES OF FAMOUS  
★ CIRCUS STARS ★  
UNDER THE GIANT TENT  
★ 2000 SEATS ★**

This 1966 newspaper ad was a re-hash of one used by Cristiani Bros. Circus in 1959.

Sarasota prior to the official road opening. Originally the Sarasota stand was to be in late February, but it was moved back to allow additional time for the phone promotion crew to work. Dee Aldrich, was in charge of the phones with Skinny Goe, Bill Garden and two women working the phones.

On April 23 Gene Christian, general agent of the Beers-Barnes Circus, wrote to George W. Lilly about the Sarasota stand on April 22 as follows: "The Latest on Robbins Bros. The tent circus (one ring) by that name, gave its first performance at Sarasota yesterday. It will not exhibit today, or for the next

27 days, but on May 21 is expected to appear at Brunswick, Georgia and start playing consecutive dates northward into western Virginia. The Robbins opus came as an unexpected surprise to me. I did not learn of it until earlier this week when an ad and a publicity picture appeared in a Sarasota paper, announcing that it would exhibit for one day at 4 and 8 P.M. at the athletic field of the Cardinal Mooney School grounds on Fruitville Road, three miles east of downtown Sarasota. I had been wondering about the Robbins show. I learned that a reorganization had taken place close to a month ago at which time the Sarasota play date was settled upon. It had to be made, as the show had worked a boiler room with the Sarasota County Sheriff's Posse as sponsor and came up with a \$4,300.00 sale. The date originally set for February 23 had been postponed a couple of time. About half the sale was banners and I counted about 85 up in the big top. They sold for \$17.50 each and cost the show \$1.50 each to letter as they were done by a professional sign man.

"I reached the lot about 2:20 and while the big top was up only part of the seats were and the large ring had not yet been set out. I didn't see any animals, beyond dogs, and I don't think there were any to be seen. It was not to represent the 'show on the road' in any case.

"The top is blue and side walls orange and blue and looks like an 85 with two forties and one thirty. It's too large, but in almost new condition. King show top (new) is only a 70 and Hoxie top (new) only a 60 and Sells & Gray looks like an 80. The midway consisted of a large side show that had been at the Sarasota fair recently, and it did no business, a pony ride and a Florida alligator show operated by Bobbie Hall, son of circus agent Doc Hall. The pony ride got about all the midway business there was. A fellow showed up about 3 P.M. and installed a candy floss machine. The show's ticket wagon was the only other midway adjunct. Belmonte Cristiani had a refreshment stand on wheels inside the big top from which a butcher worked the audience.

"I was visiting with Bobbie Hall on the midway when I saw Jack Smith come running out of the big top and he looked 20 years older than when I had seen him in January. He looked and acted completely worn out and he later he said he was about to drop.

"The people who were predicting calamity were the ones who couldn't see that Smith needed a little help. He had no working men. Some kids from the Sarasota High School Sailor Circus



helped put up the big top the day before, and it took seven hours. Smith had a few blues at the back end--for about 300 people. The grandstand was up with about 500 yellow chairs, some of which I put up.

"While under the big top between 3 and 3:30--no general public on the lot yet--I thought I recognized someone helping Belmonte Cristiani

straighten a center pole, and recognized Mogodor [Paul], his brother. Paul saw me and came over. He said he made contact with Smith three weeks before, and while Smith said he had no money, could not get events, and Paul told him he was in the same boat--they got together to put on this date to get some, meanwhile sending out a young fellow to set dates who Paul said he acquired. Meanwhile, they got some dates by mail and I heard it said that Pete Cristiani donated some. Bobbie Hall said the young agent is not getting much money up there as there isn't much to send at present, and he is sleeping in his car. Anyhow, Paul is general agent, and probably through excitement or overzealousness, was already speaking of the show as either his or theirs, without mentioning Smith. But to all intents and purpose he is presently general agent, manager, fixer and lot superintendent, and it was encouraging to observe so much vitality and interest around. Just what Smith needs to keep his spirits up. Smith is a good wagon man. Joe Sullivan and his wife were hanging the 85 banners. Doc Hall was supervising the whole job from a chair. I had to leave at 3:45 and by that time 25 people, mostly children, were on the lot--and all were waiting in line at the pony ride.

"I got back to the lot at 7 P.M. and talked with Doc Hall who said they had a fair matinee but a pretty good performance--which ran too long. About half of it consisted of the city high school Sailor Circus performers along with a few professional ground acts who live in more or less retirement around town.

"Paul came by and asked me if I would take the one grandstand gate while he sold reserves from a ladder near it. There were no seats on the six-bit side or front end, although show has more lumber. By 8:15 the grandstand was full although I had only collected 150 tickets--the rest walked in at the ends from the front door and back



The lumber semi and ticket wagon on the lot Sarasota, Florida April 22, 1966. The "World Toured" appeared on only two trucks in 1966. David Orr photo.

end blues as there was no one to watch those ends. I was in the middle of the 500 chairs at the only gate.

"The show got started at 8:40 and opened with a rope spinning number. I had already received a few beefs from people who entered my gate with reserve seat tickets--one guy who handed me eight tickets had to make a speech to everyone in center section how I ought to be ashamed to be with such an outfit, so after the second act I blew my chair and didn't go back.

"I met Jack Smith out where the marquee had stood and he asked me where Charlie Campbell was working. I thought everybody knew, but apparently he didn't. He seemed hot as hell. I never saw anyone so overwrought without cracking what he was sore about, but I realized he was all nerves from tension getting his show opened to make one good date.

"Paul said they will have some real help, bosses, two billers, a family act with an elephant that was with [Robert] Earl last season."

Paul Cristiani had asked Gene Christian to go to Ohio to book dates for the Robbins show. Christian did not give Cristiani a definite answer and Cristiani was to call him back in a few days. A call was made but Christian was not at home. When contact was finally made Christian turned the Robbins show down. Christian wrote to

George Lilly suggesting that he contact Cristiani regarding an agent's job.

Lilly made telephone contact with Jack Smith on April 27. Smith sent Lilly a letter on that date confirming their conversation and enclosed three types of contracts, one without sponsor, one for Robbins Bros. and one for Cristiani-Wallace Bros. If the Cristiani-Wallace contract was used Lilly

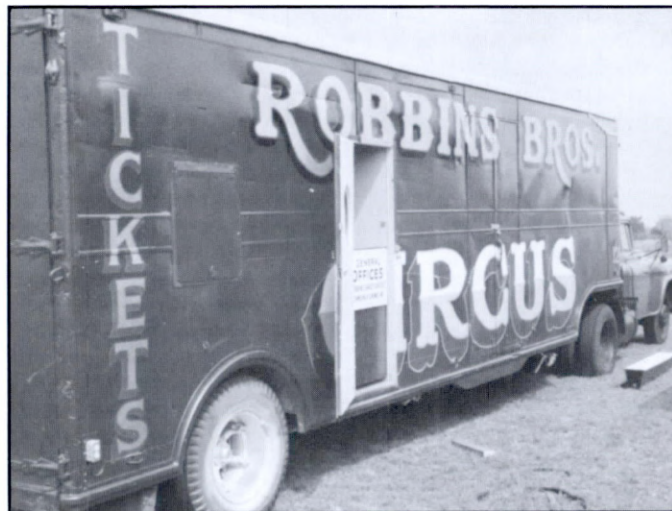
was to tell the sponsor that "Robbins Bros. operates as a number two unit" to Cristiani-Wallace. Smith added: "You will run into Kelly-Miller and King as far as I know at this point--Sells & Gray will not take Ohio and I think K-M will make a fast trip to Michigan as they are in Benton Harbor in June. We will do the best we can by you financially until we can get on our feet--good luck."

May 19 had been set as the opening date, but Paul Cristiani had trouble booking dates prior to Brunswick, Georgia on May 21.

Smith wrote to Gus Taliaferro on April 27, 1966: "Well the Sarasota date is now history. We made it! How, I don't know. Anyhow we had a good day. The gross was a little over \$5,500.00 including the advance promotion. We wound up with a little over \$1,600.00 for our end. So if we can do this every day we will soon be out of the hole.

"At the present time--following the

In 1966 the semis were painted red. Robbins Bros. was silver outlined in blue. Circus was in white and yellow outlined in blue. David Orr photo.





opening on May 21 we have three open days so far. About three quarters of June is booked and we have some towns set in July. We expect to have at least fifty days set by the time we open. This isn't bad considering that we have only been booking about four weeks. Every contract except two are with phones and we have crews working in most every town on the route so far."

The Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus officially opened in Brunswick, Georgia on May 21, 1966, in the rain. The phone crew had taken in \$2,853.40 and the ticket wagon sale was \$974.90. The Brunswick date was played as Cristiani-Wallace Bros. This was a "hand-me-down" contract from Pete Cristiani and the sponsor insisted that the Cristiani-Wallace title be used.

Since the date was played as Cristiani-Wallace no Robbins paper was posted for the opening date. The remaining 1965 Acme Robbins lithos were used on following dates until it was fully used.

On opening day the show was well populated with members of the Cristiani family. Paul brought a number of his brothers and sisters to fill out the performance and key boss positions. Belmonte was big top canvas superintendent. Belmonte and sister Corky had the concessions. They had a midway food joint in a semi-trailer pulled by a rented Hertz tractor. A walk through snake pit show was also on the midway as well as a pony ride. Robert Brown, who had been in charge of the Cristiani Bros. Circus office, had the same position on Robbins.

Freddie Canestrelli and wife Ortans Cristiani worked their rolla-bolla, a trampoline act and leaps. Belmonte's wife Deliah did an aerial number. Sister Corky probably also worked in the show. There was also a small elephant, a chimp act, a dog act and a pony drill in the performance. Charlie Moyer with his trumpet led the band with a drummer and an organ player.

The show was in Georgia through the end of May. May 22 was idle then came Lyons 23, Sylvania 24, Sandersville 25, Covington 26, Greensboro 27, Monroe 28, idle 29 and 30 and Lavonia 31. There was rain on each of these



Kids were used to erect the big top in Monroe, Georgia on May 28, 1966. Light plant semi No. 105 is in background. Joe Bradbury photo.

days. All of the dates except Lavonia had good promotions and up and down wagon sales. The Lavonia stand had only a \$116.00 promotion and a \$317.00 ticket sale on the lot.

During these early dates performances were given at 6 and 8 P.M.

The show was idle on June 1 and played Asheville, North Carolina on the 2nd. The weather was good and there had been a \$3,108.00 phone promotion, the highest of the road tour, and a \$905.61 wagon sale. Black Mountain followed on the 3rd, Hendersonville the 4th and Lenoir the 6th. June 5 was idle.

During the early weeks on the road the circus had encountered much difficulty, principally due to lack of staff and working men. The pressure and strain on Smith was tremendous.

The show was tightly framed with a couple of the trailers being quite heavy. The pole semi had been constructed along the lines of the one Smith had seen over the years with Cole Bros. The chair truck and prop truck was also a heavy load. The 1959 Chevrolet tractors were not able to pull these heavy semis and some broke down.

The 1966 Robbins big top and lumber truck in Monroe, Georgia. All of the tractors were painted white. Joe Bradbury photo.



Paul Cristiani went to York, South Carolina and leased three large tractors from his father-in-law Pete Sodawski, one of which was a large International. As the season wore on the Chevrolets were abandoned and the three leased tractors were doubling back to gilly the show owned trailers.

On September 13, 1966 Jack Smith wrote to George Lilly and told of

the problems on the show after it opened. He said: "During February and March the pressure was really on as creditors were pushing me hard for money that I didn't have until we drew out of the promotion fund. On April 19 we moved all of this equipment to Sarasota for an April 22 performance. Now with no help to get the thing up or down--I worked like a damn fool physically--which I should not have done--about five continuous days of this before we finally got the show up, down and back to quarters. The doctor told me to stop all physical labor--but with no help I had to work.

"Then after we moved out for Brunswick it got worse. We had absolutely no help--not even enough drivers to get all of the trucks to Brunswick. Paul was no help at all so I was laying out the lots, working as the electrician plus doing other jobs. And during the first ten days we had nothing but continuous hard rains. This meant that I was working about 20 hour a day--no rest and no food and still nothing but executive help from Paul.

"Anyhow, I had been operated on several years back for a double hernia and about the second week out I began to feel like I had possibly torn this thing open again. When I told Paul that something had to be done I couldn't go on much further. Paul being the sharpie that he was he suggested that I go to a hospital. But I didn't want to do that. I continued to work--continued to feel very bad and I finally got to the point where I just could not drag. Now Paul really began to work on me. He knew I was sick and he tried to make life miserable for me.

"By the time we reached Asheville on June 2nd--I had had it. I couldn't go any further and Paul was insisting that I go to a doctor. A friend was visiting from Hendersonville (20 miles) and he suggested his doctor go over

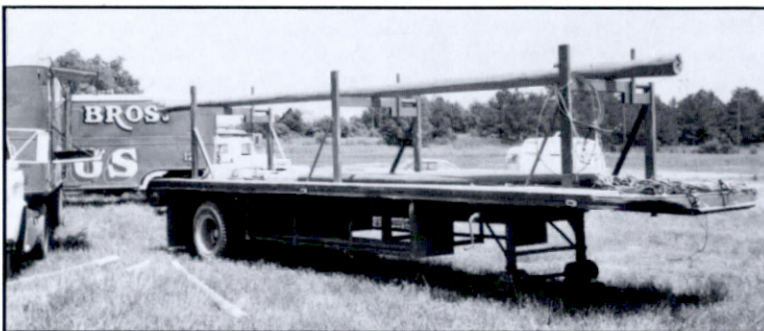


me. His doctor was at the hospital and we went there. The doctor could find no damage to the hernia. He was writing a prescription for me in the emergency room and while he was doing that I completely passed out. They then determined that I had suffered a light heart attack and they demanded that I check into the hospital. I told them about the situation on the show and said I would be back in a couple of days. I went back to the show in Asheville. I told Paul I was going in the hospital in a couple of days until I could get back on my feet. By the day I was to go to the hospital Paul had really gone berserk and he was putting it to me real good and he never showed up in Hendersonville until almost eleven in the evening. There went the hospital deal as I couldn't leave the show. Paul made it as rough as he could. He told Bob Brown, the office man, that I was to get absolutely no money from the wagon. We finally got the show down that night and I went back to the motel. The next morning I went to Brown and begged \$40.00 off of him. [In a recent interview Paul Cristiani recalled the confrontation in the motel with Smith in Asheville. Cristiani said that a "redistribution" of sponsor money that had been sent back to show by promoters took place during the meeting.]

"I left a letter with him for Paul explaining that I was going back to Sarasota for a week or so and that I would return to the show and that he was to keep in touch with me. I was home a few days when Brownie called me and told what Paul was doing and that he was leaving and advised that I come back to the show. I told him that was impossible as I was undergoing treatment and the doctor wouldn't permit it."

Robbins Bros. was idle on June 7 and played Abingdon, Virginia on the 8th. The Abingdon stand was the poorest of the season with only a \$43.00 phone promotion and a wagon sale of \$147.00. Marion, Virginia had been booked for June 9 but was cancelled. On June 10 the show was in Rural Retreat, Troutville 11, idle 12 and Elkins, West Virginia 13.

The show played Lexington, Virginia on June 14. The light



The pole and canvas semi was remodeled for the 1966 tour. An extra center pole is on the wagon. Joe Bradbury photo.

plant semi was left at a truck stop on highway 11 near Lexington. Robbins Bros was in Clifton Forge on the 14th where a tractor was left in a garage. A third tractor was left on highway 60 four miles east of Clifton Forge after it broke down. The office wagon was left at a Gulf Oil Company station near Clifton Forge. The motors or transmission had been burned out on each of the trucks. The semis were being hauled by the three leased Sodawski tractors that were doubling back. On June 16 the circus showed in Stuart Draft and played Martinsburg, West Virginia on the 17. The Fraternal Order of Police sponsored the show in Martinsburg and due to a contract misunderstanding they attached the big top. A deal was made to put on the performance and committee returned the canvas and kept all of the money for the date.

Winchester was the June 18, date followed by Front Royal and Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. June 21 and 22 were idle. Uniontown was shown on the 23rd. June 24 was idle, Washington 25, idle 26, Johnstown 27 and idle 28. The circus played Donora, Pennsylvania on June 29 where the canvas and pole semi and the lumber semi were abandoned on

The office wagon is pictured on the Monroe, Gerogia lot in 1966. Joe Bradbury photo.



the lot. The show closed. Dates had been booked through July 8 in Ohio. It is not known if the phone promotions had worked these dates.

Paul Cristiani returned the three tractors to his father-in-law and also laid claim to the chairs and the marquee.

The chairs were sold to a man in Orlando, Florida and the marquee was sold to Hoxie Tucker.

During the 41 days on the road the show had been idle 11. The total income from phone promotions was \$52,768.50. Ticket wagon sales totaled \$34,208.87. The total gross income for the season was \$86,977.37.

Unaware of what had happened to the show after he left, Smith wrote to George Lilly on July 8, 1966 saying: "I am still very much in the dark about what is going on. I received a wire from the show's regular agent requesting \$1,500.00 in as much as Paul had told him something along that line."

"Prior to the opening--my association with Paul was fine. I felt he was in earnest in that he wanted to earn a few dollars legitimately. However after the opening it was a different story. In three weeks around the show (working as an electrician and not as manager) I received from the wagon a total of seventy-five dollars."

"I sincerely felt the show could make a few dollars. I also felt that you could book us through Ohio with chances of making some money. We knew that we could not have a long season, but fully expected to stay out 15 to 18 weeks and had hoped to put in around forty days in Ohio. I was aware that you had booked in Ohio--however he decided to change the July 2 and July 4 dates."

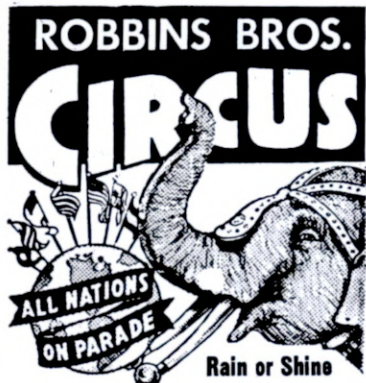
"I have not as yet been contacted by the show or Paul--only the creditors screaming for payment of past due accounts and the insurance company crying for premium payments. Undoubtedly he has paid absolutely nothing since the show opened. It is my understanding from a fan in the Uniontown area, that he is moving four vans with one

tractor. All the tractors that we left Sarasota with have undoubtedly been left setting on lots. I also understand that the big top was attached in West Virginia as the show was unable to play the town."

"Everything on the show is



**WAYNE HEIGHTS CIVIC PARK**  
**WAYNESBORO**  
**UNDER THE BIG TOP**  
**6 and 8 PM**  
**MONDAY JUNE 20**  
**WAYNE HTS. CIVIC ASSN.**



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**HORSES AND PONIES - BIG GROUP**  
**OF PERFORMING WILD ANIMALS**  
**Herds of Performing ELEPHANTS** | **Educated SEA LIONS**

This 1966 newspaper advertisement, also a rehashed Cristianai Bros. Circus design, was used for the Waynesboro, Pennsylvania stand shortly before the Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus closed.

mortgaged and controlled by a corporation of which Paul has no interest. Not knowing just where the show is, makes it even tougher to expect the creditors to move in on him. I have lost everything that I had and not a chance in the world to get a dime. My investment cash wise was just about \$28,000.00. I appreciate what you have done and I know that the amount sent to you did not compensate you, but at that time, it was the best I could do. If you have any information please advise."

On July 10 George Lilly wrote to Smith saying: "After our phone conversation Charles Moyer called me from Sunbury, Pennsylvania and asked what I intended to do. I told him I intended to protect the interests of Jack Smith and as Moyer had requested money from

you, and as Paul Cristiani was operating Robbins Bros. Circus and was receiving the receipts from the show, that was the logical source for money to pay claims. He wanted to know what part he had in such legal proceedings and I advised him that I would present his claim along with yours.

"As I volunteered my services to you with the knowledge that you were not in financial position to advance any expenses, it is necessary that I know just exactly what you want me to do. From what I found out from Moyer when we catch up with the equipment and Paul Cristiani I don't think there will be any money, however, the equipment is valuable to any one in the circus business, but is junk to anyone else.

"I am making every effort to locate the show, in the meantime send me everything you have to prove your ownership of the equipment."

Smith wrote to Lilly on July 10 saying: "Undoubtedly you received a call from Charlie Moyer last night. I talked to him and asked him to call you. My understanding from him was that the show was idle and laying at Donora, Pennsylvania. The show date for Donora was June 29th. He said the show was not able to move due to difficulty with the one and only tractor left on the show. Also due to the fact that Paul has no performers. Moyer said he left the show on July 5th and returned home after Paul told him that he could do nothing about his percentage of gross ticket sales.

"With the show at Donora this means that it did not play Waynesburg, Pennsylvania on June 30, Bridgeport, Ohio July 1, Elyria July 2, Avon Lake July or Lorain July 7. I cannot give you any information on Waynesboro, however the sponsor at Bridgeport was Veterans of Second World War. You have information on your two towns. I understand from Moyer that Lorain is to be played this week due to a good advance sale. It appears that Paul is planning to re-frame for a ball park type of show.

"Moyer told me where the trucks and semi-trailers had been left. The three tractors and the office trailer are under mortgage with a balance due on each vehicle. This means that he only retained trucks without mortgages, these are the light plant, lumber and pole trailers. The three tractors and the office van are under chattel mortgage in the amount of \$13,999.00 to the Mercantile Trust Company in St. Louis. The Texas National Bank of Houston has a \$1,705.00 mortgage on the light plant. The big top apparently is free of lien by O'Henry, that note being pur-

chased by Alex Irwin. However it is mortgaged as security for a five thousand loan from the Citizens State Bank at Hugo, Oklahoma. All of the grandstand chairs, lumber, lighting equipment and rigging is free and clear of encumbrances.

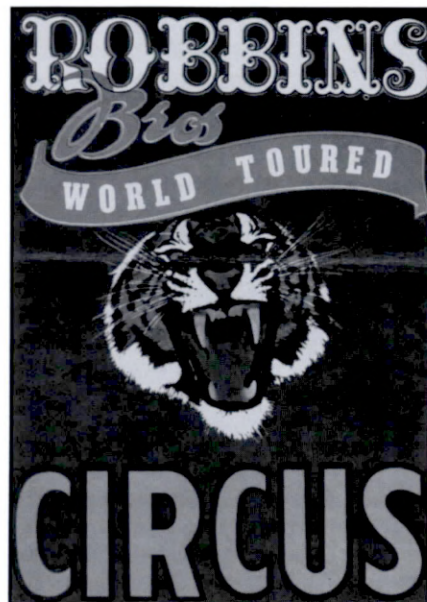
"Presently there is no written agreement between Paul Cristiani and myself or the corporation. We had drawn up incorporation papers, but this was never completed as the legal fees were not paid.

"Every piece of equipment is owned by the Coastal Circus Operating Company. All trucks were licensed in Alabama under the operating company name. All notes and mortgages are in the name of the operating company with me as president. Insurance on both trucks and lot are through Lenz. All insurance will be cancelled on July 19 since not one daily report has been sent from the show regarding daily gross.

"I have an unpaid bill from Central Show Print for date cards in the amount of \$946.00. On top of this I have been stuck with a \$600.00 truck repair bill on my Gulf Oil credit card."

Smith and Lilly continued their efforts to locate trucks left along the route. By early August Smith had located much of the Robbins equipment. He understood that the pole wagon No. 251 and the lumber truck No. 119 were sitting on the show grounds in Donora, Pennsylvania and that the office wagon was stored in Lexington, Virginia. The

Window card used by Robbins Bros. World Toured Circus during the 1965 season. The tiger head is in full color. It was printed by Acme Show Print.





whereabouts of the light plant trailer was unknown at the time. Meanwhile G. C. Venz, president of the Central Show Printing Company, was also trying to get his hands on some of the equipment in an effort to sell it and recover part of the back printing bills. On August 17, 1966 Venz sent a \$100.00 retainer fee to a lawyer in Lexington, Virginia. He also sent an itemized statement for \$1,264.17.

Late in August George Lilly went to Donora, Pennsylvania and Lexington, Virginia. He found two Robbins semis parked on the Carroll Township Fire Department lot in Donora. Lilly was working with the attorney hired by Central Show Print. At this point Smith and Lilly were thinking of a sheriff's sale of the equipment when they got their hands on it.

Smith wrote to Lilly on August 21: "Before any of the stuff is sold at a sheriff's sale I believe it would be wise to check with Venz. I know you do not have the money, nor do I, to buy the stuff back. Actually the lien holders should be given preference such as the banks involved. There is also the question of the man in Iowa [Alex Irwin] who put \$13,000.00 [earlier Smith had stated the amount was \$21,000] in the show, though he has nothing to show for it other than cancelled checks."

In early September George Lilly received a letter from Paul Barna, an attorney in Donora, Pennsylvania, saying that he had inspected the equipment located there on the Fire Department lot. He said he had found a big trailer filled with seats and another with poles and canvas. He advised Lilly that he could levy and sell the equipment where it was, but that arrangements would then have to be made to move it to a location or to be disposed of as Lilly saw fit.

On September 16 Paul Cristiani came to Smith's house in Sarasota. Cristiani gave Smith a list of where the equipment had been left. He also advised Smith that Central Show Print had sent a representative to Donora to attach the show's share of the phone promotion in the bank. But the man had arrived on show day and the money had been removed from the bank only a few hours earlier.

In October Lilly was advised by the Donora lawyer that he had been contacted by a Tampa attorney who said he represented Alexander Irwin, who claimed title to the tent.



The Robbins Bros. Circus marquee is shown here being used on the Hoxie Bros. Circus side show during the 1971 season.

The two trucks were still at the Volunteer Fire Department in Donora. The secretary of the fire group wrote to Lilly on October advising that they were going to charge \$100.00 per month storage beginning August 1. He added that lien notices had been posted on the trailers and they could not be removed without notifying the fire group.

Early in December 1966 Lilly sent a check for the storage costs and took possession of the two trucks. The Donora attorney handled the transaction for Lilly. In a December 6 letter Lilly was advised by the attorney that "your man from New Jersey" came into the office and took one of the rigs today and advised he would be back in a day or so for the other one.

The "man from New Jersey" was Buck McLain. He moved the trucks to his farm in Farmingdale, New Jersey. Charlie Moyer reported in January 1988 that he understood the big top was still on the McLain property in recent years. Nothing is known about the office or light plant either. Some of the equipment showed up on other small shows during the 1967 season.

Alex J. Irwin had advanced \$13,000.00 to Smith to keep the show open. No notes had been signed nor any security given to cover the loans. After much haggling with his backer Smith finally asked Alex J. Irwin to employ an attorney in Tampa to represent his interest in the circus. It is doubtful that Irwin recovered any equipment or any money. Irwin, a CHS member, died in the early 1970s.

Jack S. Smith went to work for the Foley and Burke carnival in California

in 1967. He later worked for the Blue Grass carnival, Bill English's Circus Classics and the Royal Hanneford Circus. He retired in 1977 and now resides in Florida.

Paul Cristiani remained in the circus business for a few years after the Robbins show closed. For the last ten years he has lived in Las Vegas, Nevada where he is employed by the Sands Hotel.

Belmonte Cristiani is retired and lives in Sarasota, Florida.

George Lilly, who had owned Penny Bros. Circus in 1960 and 1961, died about

five years ago.

Charles Moyer is living in Sarasota, Florida. He was band director on Hoxie Bros. Circus for a number of years and is still an active musician. In 1987 he was manager of Vidbel's Odle Tyme Circus.

James Hoffman, former owner of the Acme Show Print, died a few months ago.

After researching the financial records and what documents still remain of Robbins Bros. Circus, Inc., the basic question comes to mind--why did the show fail? One reason appears to be the hiring of personnel during both seasons who destroyed the operation.

The shopping center contracts in 1965 did not turn out to be favorable to the show.

The shopping center plan presented a challenge as it had not been before tested. The Fred J. Mack Circus, a similar sized show, had attempted to go the shopping center route in 1955 and had failed, for many of the same reasons as the Robbins Bros. show. Both circuses may have been a few years ahead of themselves. In the following years many tented circuses such as James Bros., Circus Vargas and Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. successfully proved that such an operation was workable.

During the 1966 season the money that came from the advance promotions was not properly handled, causing many problems.

The lack of a strong advance department was a weakness both 1965 and 1966. The show was idle a number of days in 1966 due to lack of contracted dates.

Additional research material for this article was provided by John Polacsek, Joe Bradbury, Charles Moyer, Ted Bowman, D. R. Miller, Tommie Randolph, David Orr and Paul Cristiani.



# JOHN ROBINSON CIRCUS

## Season of 1921 Part Two

By Joseph T. Bradbury

In mid July it was announced that applications had been filed for increasing the capitalization of three of the circuses belonging to the Mugivan, Bowers, and Ballard combination. The proposed increases were: Howes Great London Shows Company from \$100,000 to \$190,000; the Hagenbeck-Wallace Shows Company from \$100,000 to \$680,000 and the John Robinson Shows Company from \$100,000 to \$450,000. It was said that the changes in capitalization were for the purpose of meeting present conditions in the show business.

The show's date at Springfield, Illinois on July 11 was an interesting one. The arrival of the new baby elephant, Virginia, was the subject of two articles in the July 23, 1921 *Billboard*. One piece said that the John Robinson Circus was the proud possessor of the smallest baby elephant in captivity. Virginia was the name of the tiny pachyderm, which arrived in a padded crate from Lancaster, Missouri. The tiny baby was a trifle over three feet in height and weighs 600 pounds. The little "Jumbo" was purchased from William P. Hall, the well known wild animal dealer, and was raised on his farm at Lancaster. She was four months old and one of the few baby elephants in the country to thrive in captivity.

The story said that as soon as the Illinois Central Railroad delivered the animal at the local freight station on Sunday night the crate containing the little animal was transferred to the circus lot. The other elephants in the herd were wildly excited over the arrival of the little stranger and made strenuous efforts to adopt the baby for their own, trumpeting and squealing and trying to embrace the little animal with their trunks but were prevented from doing so by the trainers. The little elephant was placed on exhibition in the menagerie July 11 for the first time and was the center of attraction of the big crowd in attendance. The article concluded that Virginia would undoubtedly prove a big drawing card during the coming Chicago engagement, since baby elephants as small as she were very scarce.

The other note in the same *Billboard* said that John Robinson continued to

play to big audiences daily despite the lull in industrial conditions and the terrific heat. The big show was now touring Illinois, where the farmers managed to find time to see the circus. In the larger cities many industrial plants had ceased operations, but everybody went to the circus just the same. The article then gave detail accounts of several stands as follows: "Springfield, Ill. July 11-Early arrival on Sunday morning, with the lot about a mile from town. This was one of the banner stands of the tour. The new baby elephant attracted a lot of attention and The Springfield Morning Journal carried a big front-page story regarding the tiny pachyderm. 'Best circus seen here in years' was the unanimous verdict of press and public in the Illinois capital city.



John Robinson Circus midway in 1921. Side show bannerline is in rear. Pfening Archives.

"Jacksonville, Ill., July 12-Large audiences matinee and night in spite of weather conditions.

"Macomb, Ill., July 13-Late arrival and long haul. Owing to the late arrival of the trains and the terrific heat no parade was given here. Several of the horses were affected by the heat, and rather than incur any losses of animals it was deemed advisable to cancel the parade. The show lot was the fair grounds. Fair matinee and large night attendance.

"Canton, Ill., July 14-Excellent business both matinee and night. While the parade was out a drenching downpour of rain occurred. However, the skies soon

cleared and big business at the matinee and night was registered.

"Princeton, Ill., July 15-This hustling little city gave an excellent day's business. The circus goes from Princeton to White City, Chicago, for a two-day engagement, July 16 and 17."

The article concluded by stating that two new llamas and three kangaroos were added to the menagerie, while the new baby elephant was the big attraction for the children. As mentioned earlier the little elephant was placed in a cage compartment of the huge cage with three semi-circular dens.

After Chicago the show started on the 12th week at Streator, Illinois, July 18, then played Lincoln, Decatur, and Pana, and concluded the week in Indiana for Washington and Seymour.

The July 30, 1921 *Billboard* carried

the story of the two day stand in White City, Chicago, stating the show was the first into the Windy City that season and that crowded tents were the rule. Many visitors came to the lot, some of the more prominent being Ed Ballard and family, Dan Odom, manager of Howes Great London, Charles Ringling, D. C. Hawn of the Rhoda Royal Circus, and Ed C. Knupp, general agent of Sells-Floto.

The Sells-Floto Circus arrived in Gary, Indiana at noon Sunday and most of the executive staff and performers paid the John Robinson folks a visit. Among the Sells-Floto visitors were Don Montgomery, band leader; William Wells, equestrian director; Poodles Hanneford and family; and numerous others.

Other items in the article said that a



new middle piece was used in the menagerie tent for the first time in Chicago and the menagerie was now a five-pole top, made necessary by the recent purchase of several new animals with the show. Manager Jerry Mugivan was showered with congratulations by his many friends during the engagement. Other stands were covered as follows: "Streator, Ill., July 18-Rain fell during the matinee heavily, but big business at both matinee and night.

"Lincoln, Ill., July 19-Fair weather and good business. When the show trains arrived four camels were found dead in their car, having met death while in transit, the animals having been trampled to death.

"Decatur, Ill., July 20-One of the biggest days of the season. This town is in flourishing condition and show hungry. Bert Bowers was a visitor at the night show. George Steele, legal adjuster, is back with the show and this being his home town, met a host of friends.

"Pana, Ill., July 21-Another big day. All stores closed down the day and work was suspended at the mines to allow the employees to attend the circus. James Patterson, owner of the Great Patterson Shows, and family were visitors at the matinee performance."

Evidently the show was running short of personnel as the same issue carried a large advertisement saying that John Robinson Circus "Wants Circus People in All Departments." The show needed lady and gent aerialists, double and single trapeze, lady iron jaw acts, lady and gent ground acts, lady race riders, menage riders, wild west performers for the concert, solo and assistant solo cornets, baritone, flute, piccolo and others for the band. Side show attractions, novelty acts and colored musicians.

As the 13th week came around the show was in Ohio playing stands at Chillicothe and Athens, then the route carried it into West Virginia for Charleston, Huntington, and Parkersburg. A run back into Ohio at Marietta on July 30 completed the week.

The 14th week saw the show playing in three states. The week began at Steubenville, Ohio which was followed by a return to West Virginia for Wheeling and Fairmont and then on into Maryland to play Cumber-



Cookhouse boiler wagon and cook tent on the 1921 John Robinson Circus. Pfening Archives.

land, Hagerstown, and Frederick.

All of the 15th week was spent in Virginia with stands coming at Winchester, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton, Charlottesville, and Danville.

The August 6, 1921 *Billboard* said that Seymour, Indiana proved to be one of the biggest dates of the season for the John Robinson Circus on July 23. It was the first circus to show there in several years. Owing to there being no available lot in town, the show pitched its tents at Aviation Field, nearly two miles from the center of the city. Pat Rooney, oldtime clown and showman, and now clerk at the Lynn House, was on hand.

Sunday, July 24, found the show in Chillicothe, Ohio. The circus was located at City Park, right near the center of the city. A sad incident occurred at 4 p. m., when Russell Bockman, a young man employed on the front door drowned in the Scioto River while swimming. Bockman had been with the show for the last three years. The body was recovered two hours later and removed to a local undertaking establishment. A telegram was sent to the lad's father at Scranton, Pennsylvania, but no reply was received, so the remains

Side show bandwagon No. 43 with paintings of Roman chariot racing on side in Robinson Memphis parade in 1921. Miller photo in Bradbury collection.



were sent to Peru, Indiana, for interment by the circus management. Charles Young, boss canvasser, circulated a collection paper and nearly \$200 was raised among the showfolks to help defray the burial expenses. On Monday, July 25, despite a heavy rain storm, a big matinee and night business was registered.

The account continued: "Athens, O., July 26-This city was show hungry and it was one of the biggest days of the season for the show.

"Charleston, W. Va., July 27-Owing to a last minute change of plans and the fact that there were no lots in the city large enough to accommodate the circus, the tents were pitched at Kanawa City, two miles from town with poor street car facilities. This was the third circus of the season here, and owing to the industrial depression, only a fair business was the result. Governor Ephraim Morgan and family were in attendance at the matinee. Another welcome visitor was John F. White, old showman and a prominent city official.

"Huntington, W. Va., July 28-Excellent business here both matinee and night. Harry La Pearl, the noted clown, who was principal funmaker with the John Robinson Circus for many years, was on the lot bright and early. Harry is now located here, being in the electric sign business. At the night performance he took his old place in the clown band, playing a trombone solo and performing the merry antics that made him famous in the circus world.

"Parkersburg, W. Va., July 29-A heavy rain storm during the morning but that did not deter thousands from watching the parade. At noon the skies cleared and a big matinee audience was on hand."

Final notes in the coverage said that Joe Hodgini, who sustained a sprained ankle recently at Kalamazoo, Michigan was well on the road to recovery and expected to return to the sawdust ring

next week. Tetu Robinson recently underwent a severe operation at the Mayo Bros. Sanatorium at Rochester, Minnesota and was rapidly convalescing.

Many readers are no doubt familiar with the marvelous photograph taken of the John Robinson Circus on the lot at Cleveland, on May 27-28 1921. It pictures the entire show set up on the lake front



and was one of many such shots taken by a Cleveland photographer in the 1920s and 30s. Frank Pouska loaned the photo and it was run in my Old Circus Album feature in *The White Tops* of July-August 1977. The photo is an important source of research for this article. In the shot are clearly seen all of major tents with exception of the padroom which is hidden behind the menagerie. The four center pole big top, as indicated in the *Billboard* article, was a 150 ft. round with three 50's. The menagerie tent had 4 center poles and was about an 80 with three 40's. (If the report is correct the show later in the season added another middle and a 5th center pole.) The sideshow was about a 60 with two 40's and 3 center poles. Fronting it were 14 double deck banners plus a large entrance banner. Cookhouse was a square end top about a 45 x 120, and there were three stable tents for baggage stock, 35 x 105. The padroom top which cannot be seen was about a 60 with two 40's.

In addition to the main sideshow, also on the midway was a small pit show tent with three banners. There were three banners. There were three large concession stands with stripped canvas, probably red and white, plus one smaller stand with an umbrella type top.

The marquee was lettered "Big Show. Main Entrance" and the large banner over the sideshow entrance had a likeness of the first John Robinson. The Great Wallace clown ticket wagon was parked on the left side of the midway near the marquee while another ticket wagon, probably for reserved seats, was on the opposite side further out, just beyond the sideshow bannerline.

Cage wagon in a 1921 John Robinson Circus parade. Pfening Archives.



Polar bear cage in 1921 Memphis parade. Most of the cages that season were rather short and plain as is this one. Miller photo in Bradbury collection.

The wagon was a box type with a painting on the side. The painting appeared to have a lion in a jungle scene.

What is impressive in the photo in addition to picturing the physical aspects of the show is the huge numbers of patrons on the lot. The midway is packed with people and they can be seen wandering all over the place. The photo was evidently taken just prior to the opening of doors for the matinee.

An interesting photo was printed in the August 13, 1921 *Billboard*. It covered two full pages and pictured all performing personnel in spec costume, the band, and several officials. The *Billboard* was printed on such a poor grade of paper during that period it is impossible to reproduce the photo here. There are 22 bandsmen in uniform shown and the spec participants are costumed as Arabs and various other nationalities and several of the women are wearing the fancy spangled headpieces which were commonly found in circus spectacles of the 1920's.

The same *Billboard* also carried the usual article covering the John Robinson activities of late. The heading said that the show "Finds Business Good in West Virginia and Maryland." The text noted that judging from the enormous business that John Robinson registered

in West Virginia and Maryland, the general business depression prevailing in many portions of the United States had not affected these prosperous states to any material extent. With but one or two exceptions capacity audiences were the rule,

and in several cases turn-aways were recorded. In several of the towns along the route other circuses preceded the show but that did not deter attendance, and the big show performance was always the recipient of many flattering comments from the press and public.

At Marietta, Ohio on Saturday, July 30, capacity audiences were present matinee and night.

The circus spent the following Sunday and Monday in Steubenville, Ohio. A late arrival brought the show in at 3 o'clock Sunday afternoon, with a long haul up a steep hill to the only available circus lot in town. Business was big at the matinee and capacity at night.

A heavy rainstorm at Wheeling hurt business somewhat, and at Fairmont, the following day, the lot was a sea of mud, but the crowds came just the same. Cumberland, Maryland was one of the best stands of the season, with perfect weather conditions, and Hagerstown was another big winner.

The article concluded by saying that Lee Ray was a newcomer with a splendid aerial act in the big show.

An advertisement on the same page as the article said the John Robinson wanted tintype, photo, bead and whistle privileges. All of these were popular midway type concessions which the show would lease for percentage or other arrangements.

Virginia was August territory for the show all through the 1920's and from the state the route would sometimes take it on into the deep south or at times it would backtrack to Ohio, Indiana, or Kentucky before starting out in earnest on an extended tour of Dixie. The August 20, 1921 *Billboard* reported on the show's tour of Virginia and adjacent states. The article said the invasion of the country below the Mason and Dixon line was turning out to be a profitable venture. The article noted: "Everybody knows that 'John Robinson' is a household word in the Sunny South, and show day is always 'John Robinson Day' in many towns." Many reports were circulated to the effect that money was scarce in West Virginia and Maryland and the failure of the apple and fruit crop accentuated these reports. While it was true that prosperity was absent in many towns, the business so far was excellent, and in several towns the crowds were great enough to tax the seating capacity of the huge main tent.





The report continued; "Frederick, Md. -August 6, was a big day, and the country folks came from miles around to see the parade and attend the circus. Many of the show folks visited historical points of interest during the day and visited the grave of Barbara Frietche, the Civil War heroine.

"The show Sundayed August 5 in Winchester, Va. Small town and short haul. One of the largest matinees of the season and a fair night business.

"Harrisonburg, Va., August 9, excellent business matinee and night.

"Lexington, Va.-August 10, another small town and a lot that could not accommodate a show of this size. It was necessary to corral the menagerie. A long parade was given, and the fact that the lot was over a mile from town, with no street car service, made things look dubious, but by 3 o'clock the big tent was packed to suffocation. Light night business here.

"Staunton, Va., August 11, two capacity audiences, matinee and night. This town was ripe for a big circus and turned out en masse. Long before matinee hour it was necessary to close the ticket wagon and hundreds were seated on the grass, the hippodrome races being omitted at the matinee. Another capacity audience at night made the day one of the best of the season.

"Charlottesville, Va., August 12, another big day, with crowded tents, matinee and night."

A final item in the article said that a new camel arrived in the menagerie and was christened "Egypt."

All of the 16th week found the show still in Virginia with two days in Norfolk and one day stands in Newport News, Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Petersburg. Three dates in the Old Dominion were played during the 17th week, Lynchburg, Roanoke, and Radford. Then the show moved into West Virginia for Bluefield and Williamson and was back in Ohio at Ironton on August 27, the final day of the week.

The September 3, 1921 *Billboard* noted that the Virginias were proving good territory for John Robinson. The article said "the old reliable" continued on its undisputed conquest of Virginia and West Virginia playing to big business at practically every stand. Petersburg on August 20, was excellent.

It continued: "Lynchburg, Va., Aug. 22. One of the visitors was ex Chief of Police Seay, who was head of the local police force for over 50 years, and who was warmly greeted by many friends with the show. At the matinee performance a delegation of members of the National Elks Home at Bedford, Va., 20 miles away were the guests of the

INCOMPARABLE IN ALL THE WORLD OF AMUSEMENT

# JOHN ROBINSON'S CIRCUS

STANDING ALONE IN GREATNESS AND COMPLETENESS

AN EVENT THAT WILL BE REMEMBERED ALWAYS

Horse Show-Speed Tournaments-Athletic Contests

A Wealth of Magnificent and Costly Departures

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Gorgeous and Most Stupendous

Unsurpassing Program Ever Mounted

GOLDEN DAYS and OLDER DAYS

GREATEST ARENIC ARTISTS

A CONCLUDING CONGRESS OF ACROBATIC, AERIAL AND GYMNASTIC WONDERS SUCH AS HAS NEVER BEFORE BEEN SEEN IN THE REALM OF CIRCUS

Earth's Most Daring Equestrians

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Feats of Horsemanship

57--QUEENS OF THE AIR--57

A CONGRESS OF SUPERB WOMEN PERFORMERS

Analyzed by Premier Male Champions

Scores of Pretty Girls Who Dance as They Ride

The Famous Raydoff Zouaves

Greatest Lightning Military Corps of its time, past or present, furnishing a complete exhibition of the tactics of war on European battle fields

COMPLETE CHINESE CIRCUS

THE GREAT SHANGHAI TROUPE

20 men and women-direct from the far East-first American appearance

Biggest, Costliest, Awe-Inspiring

MILITARY SPECTACLE

Ever Devised, Either in Europe or America, for Exhibitional Purposes

A CIRCUS TREEMING WITH WONDERS

HUNDREDS of the WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL EQUINES

5-Bands of Music-5

A Whole Colony of Lilliputian Animals, Including

CONGO, THE BABY HIPPO

A Real Nursery of Domestic and JUNGLE BEASTS

TREMENDOUS SPECTACULAR PARADE

Given on the Streets Daily at 11:00 A. M.

A FABRICATING PROFESSIONAL PANORAMA UNEQUALLED IN THE ANNALS OF CIRCUS ENTERTAINMENT

Two Performances Daily at 2:00 and 8:00 P. M. Doors Open One Hour Earlier

WILL RE-ENTER AT

Herald used by Robinson for the Guelph, Ontario stand June 22, 1921. The heralds used for the Canadian dates were printed by the W. S. Johnson Printing Co. in Toronto. Pfening Archives.

management and thoroughly enjoyed the performance. Manager Jerry Mugivan, who is a life member of the Elks, extended an invitation to his old friend, Tom W. Nelson of the Home, to come over and bring all brothers to the matinee as his guest. Mr. Nelson accepted with alacrity and with Supt. Charles Moseby brought a big delegation who occupied reserved seats and spent a pleasant day. One of the guests was Sig Feranda, old-time contortionist and performer, who is now a resident of the home. Lynchburg saw crowded houses at both performances.

"Roanoke, Va., August 28. With threatening weather and a long ways from town, business was splendid.

"Radford, Va., August 24. Small town, but big business. This was the opening day of the County Fair and hundreds of visitors from all over the county made the day a big one. The circus tents were located inside the race course.

"Norfolk, Va., August 15 and 16, and Richmond, Va., August 18, were two banner stands. Both were turnaways--Norfolk on the first night of the two-day engagement and Richmond at the evening performance. An interested visitor at Norfolk was F. J. Frink, general agent of the Walter L. Main Circus. Colonel Charles Consolvo, manager of the Monticello Hotel, and an ardent circus fan was on hand with a large party of friends, including Ned Cheshire, and spent both days around the lot. For the first time in circus history 20 special painted bulletins were used by the advance to advertise the show.

"August 17, at Newport News, Va. was a hot, sultry day, and closed shipyards caused business to fall off a little, but at night there was a big house.

"Richmond, August 18. A real circus town with crowds on the streets waiting for the parade. A capacity matinee and turnaway at night. Among visitors were Bert Rutherford of the Howe Show; T. W. Ballenger, general agent of the Sparks Circus; Larry Boyd, general agent of the World of Mirth Shows, all of whom declared it to be a real circus and a winner. George C. Moyer, general agent, was also on hand here and spent two days with the show."

A concluding note said that Ray Dick was back with the show having rejoined recently to make second openings and assist with the side show. Ray was with the B. L. Wallace Shows until its premature closing.

A most interesting article in the same *Billboard* told of the fight for territory that so many shows engaged in during the 1921 season. A number were now headed for North Carolina. The piece noted that Main, Robinson, Gentry and Sanger circuses were doing battle, but on clean-cut principles. It said that the Great Star Circus (owned by the King brothers) after a complete tour of Virginia began its Southern tour at Madison, North Carolina on August 17 and would remain in the Old North State for the next two months. Taken as a whole, business in Virginia was very good. The last stand in Virginia, being an opposition stand with Gentry Bros. Circus, considerable interest was aroused among the natives here, for it was unusual for two circuses to come so





Glass enclosed snake den No. 37 in Robinson Memphis parade in 1921. Miller photo in Bradbury collection.

close together. Business for Sanger was big at the matinee and fair at night. The article continued saying that North Carolina that season was well represented with circuses. Clashes among the brigades were in evidence every day. The John Robinson brigade had everything in sight covered with the warning that John Robinson was the only "big show" coming. In Asheville there was not space enough for a one-sheet left open. Here the first real battle came between the Gentry Bros., Walter L. Main and John Robinson. Gentry came first, and business was capacity at both performances, notwithstanding that the other two shows were against them. At High Point another real battle was staged between these same three shows. At each opposition stand the natives were spellbound and astounded, to use the press agent's term, that three shows were making their town that season. Taken as a whole the battles were fought on clean-cut principles. It was clean opposition on every hand.

The Gentry Bros. and Great Sanger clashed at Newport, Tennessee. Sanger made the town August 27, and Gentry Bros. was there September 1. L. B. Greenhaw, general agent for the Sanger Circus, rushed in with a brigade and took everything in sight. R. W. Thompson of the Gentry show arrived a little later, and the battle was on. Here was further evidence that opposition was carried on in a legitimate manner, for the fight was clean from start to finish.

The report continued stating that North Carolina, according to all reports, was the only Southern state that would be made by the larger circuses this fall. The outlook there, in the then most prosperous Southern state, was none too promising. Howes Great London, Sparks, and Cole Bros. were on their way

down there. It looked as though every little village crossroad in this state would get a circus that year.

According to the very rosy reports from John Robinson all season long that circus was not adversely affected by the widespread business depression (that term being used instead of the latter term "recession" which became popular in 1938 and subsequent years). Industrial plants, shipyards, and business in general were mentioned in numerous press accounts as being depressed during the season. The slump was sharp and followed closely on the heels of the immediate post war boom. So far little had been mentioned about any labor unrest, strikes or the threat of same. All of this, however, would come in 1922.

During the 18th week the show, after returning to the midwest, played two dates in Ohio, Portsmouth and Greenfield, one in Kentucky at Newport, two in Indiana, North Vernon and Vincennes, and one in Illinois, at Harrisburg on September 3. The show also was in four states during the 19th week. Back in Indiana John Robinson played Evansville and Princeton, returned Illinois at Mt. Vernon, then moved south to Kentucky to play Madisonville and Bowling Green, then still further south into Tennessee at Paris on the final day of the week.

While in the Cincinnati area, the traditional home base for John Robinson many years with winterquarters in Terrace Park, the *Billboard* sent a reporter to visit the show. He filed a comprehensive report in the September 10, 1921 issue. The article said that although Cincinnati and vicinity were

Cage in John Robinson Circus parade in Memphis in 1921. The elephants are following the cage. Miller photo in Bradbury collection.



surfeited with circuses that season, it did not cut the night attendance of the John Robinson Circus, which showed on the Rough Rider grounds, Newport, Kentucky, Wednesday, August 31. Business at the matinee was about a two-thirds filled tent, while in the evening it was capacity. In addition to the Robinson show the following circuses appeared in Cincinnati or across the river in Newport: Hagenbeck-Wallace, Walter L. Main, Howe's Great London and Al G. Barnes. Cincinnati and Newport were good circus towns, as was shown that season.

The report continued noting that despite the fact that the John Robinson Circus has been on the road since April 30, the rolling stock, equipment, horses, etc. were in good shape. This was one of the fastest moving shows on the road, having everything loaded by 11 p. m.

The performance "took well" with the circus goers, judging from the applause and comments heard. It was a good performance--evenly balanced. The writer said that at that time the *Billboard* would not go into detail about the performance, as that had been done a number of times. However, we will dwell briefly on it. The outstanding features were the Famous Nelson Family of nine people, who had one of the fastest acrobatic and risley acts in the business; the Eight Tangerian Arabian Troupe of tumblers and pyramid builders; two high-class comedy riding acts, in which the following participated: Cecil Lowande, Carl Romig, Minnie and Elizabeth Rooney, Irene Montgomery, Herman and Bernie Griggs in one ring, and Joe Hodgini, James McGammon, John Smith, Nettie Dill, Etta Hodgini and Doc Keen in the other; "Major," billed as the only elephant walking on its hind legs, presented by Irene Montgomery--the "bull" walked upright on the track about half the length of the reserves, supporting Miss Montgomery on its trunk; a seal that rode on a pony and balanced a ball; Ann Peterson, who did a teeth-slide on the wire; Charbino, who did a head-slide on the wire, and the Youngs, who had a fast double trapeze number.

Other good numbers included John Smith, Bernie Griggs and Herman Griggs, mule numbers; Harry Mooney and Irene Montgomery, trained elephants; Tamaki Troupe of Japanese fencing; Tetu Robinson, on the revolving globe; Three Petersons, Chas. Dryden, Chong, Tie and Oval Pirkey, jugglers; Joe Hodgini,



Cecil Lowande and John Davenport, principal riding acts; Rosina, Theol, Hilda, and Oneida Nelson, Miss Laverne, May Parker, Alma Dupuy, Irene Montgomery, Grace Hodgini, Miss Young, Miss Bennett, Lulu Gibson and Ada Laverne, swinging ladders; the Arleys and the Bernards, high perch; Irene Montgomery and Etta Hodgini and Nettie Dill, lady principal riding acts; clown band, with Doc Keene as director; Rittel Bros., Frank Coyle, Marshall Sisters, and Miss Arley, trapeze acts; posing horse, presented by Miss Stout; Lorette and Peterson and Hodgini Sisters, iron-jaw acts. Clowns appeared in great number; much to the amusement of the crowds. "Arizona Bill" furnished the Wild West concert program following the close of the big show.

Continuing, the *Billboard* reporter wrote that W. H. (Pop) McFarland's sideshow was getting good play when he visited it in the evening and Jerome Harriman's Pit Show was also being well patronized.

The article concluded stating that Fred Ledgett was one of the best equestrian directors in the show world, and saw that the performance ran in a clocklike manner. Harry Bert did the announcing. Mention must be made of the high class musical program given by William G. McIntosh and his assistants in the big show. Charlie Young was the boss canvasman; Tom McKenna, trainmaster; Mr. Miller was in charge of lights; and Charley Rooney was in charge of the baggage stock. The *Billboard* reporter found the following under the marquee: Jerry Mugivan, George Moyer, Buster Cronin, Judge Stevens, Pat Burke and Walter D. Nealand. Nealand looked after the press and saw that no visiting scribe was found waiting--even to having one park his feet under the table in the cookhouse, where he enjoyed, in company with the obliging press agent, a nicely arranged and well-cooked dinner. Visitors seen on the lot during the afternoon were, Mrs. Robert Stickney, Mrs. Dan Robinson, Julius Thomason, Ben Cook, Jake Posey, George Wombold and Bert German.

A week later the *Billboard* reported that business conditions were improving lately if one was to judge by the big business done by the John Robinson Circus during its tour of Southern Indiana and Illinois. At nearly every stand the tents were well filled and,



Line of elephants in the 1921 Memphis parade of the John Robinson Circus. Miller photo in Bradbury collection.

while there were no turnaways registered in the past two weeks, things seemed to be reaching the normal mark. The show was now in its own territory where the name of John Robinson was a household word, and since the South had always been loyal to the John Robinson title the management was confident that the closing weeks of the tour would be up to the standard reached in former years. The article then gave a detailed report of some of the show's recent stands: "North Vernon, Ind., Sept 1-This was a small town with conditions not good, but the matinee was largely attended despite the fact that heavy rain fell during the afternoon performance. Light attendance at night. H. B. Gentry, former manager of the Sells-Floto Circus, motored over from Bloomington, Ind. where he has been enjoying a well earned rest since retiring from the management of that circus. Walter Allen, former well-known elephant trainer with the Gentry Bros., and Downie & Wheeler shows was on hand and spent the day on the lot.

"Vincennes, Ind. and Harrisburg, Ill. were excellent and the show pleased everybody who attended.



Steam calliope No. 48 bringing up the rear of the Robinson parade in Memphis in 1921. Miller photo in Bradbury collection.

"Sunday, September 4, was spent in Evansville, Ind. Here the John Robinson Circus followed the Al G. Barnes show, with the Ringling-Barnum com-

pany liberally billed for an early showing. Crowded tents at the matinee, despite the sultry weather and big house at night. The Evansville Courier conducted a boy clown contest and fifty amateur clowns who won prizes in the contest participated in the parade. Al Butler and William J. Conway of the Ringling-Barnum show spent Sunday here. J. M. Beach and some of his crew from the advertising car No. 1 of the Rhoda Royal Circus were also in town and saw the matinee performance.

"Princeton, Ind. was the Tuesday date, Sept. 6. The Bigson County Fair was in progress here and with Sol's United Shows and the fair, the circus played to a big matinee house and at night filled the tent.

"Mount Vernon, Ill, Sept. 7-Small town and only fair business both matinee and night. Lot located a short distance from town, but business conditions here very poor.

"Madisonville, Ky., Sept. 8-One of the biggest matinee crowds of the season here. A heavy thunder storm at night failed to keep the crowds away."

A final note said that Captain Blum, who had been working the untamable lion act in the sideshow, left at Princeton, Indiana.

During the 20th week the show continued moving toward the deep South, its traditional fall territory. The week began with the show at Memphis, Tennessee, September 12 which was followed by additional stands in the state at Jackson and Nashville. Then it was into Alabama to play Florence, Decatur, and Birmingham. A Sunday run of 166 miles over the Southern Railway moved the show to Atlanta, Georgia for two days, Monday and Tuesday, September 19-20, which began the 21st week of the season. One additional Georgia stand came the next day at Rome, then it was back into Tennessee for Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Johnson City.

The September 24, 1921 *Billboard* covered the show's initial stands in Dixie noting that it continued on "its merry way on its tour of the Sunny South and everybody can testify that this is the Sunny South, judging from the sultry weather encountered at every stand." The weather was oppressively warm and sultry for this time of year, the temperature ranging around the hundred mark for days at a time. However, business continued





Octagon shaped monkey cage in a 1921 John Robinson parade. Pfening Archives.

up to the standard with capacity houses at Memphis.

At Bowling Green, Kentucky, the circus showed on the fairgrounds, it being the second day of the Warren County Fair, on Friday, September 9. The tents were pitched on the infield of the race course, and a big matinee was the result.

The report continued: "Paris, Tenn., Sept. 10, small town and fair business. Weather the hottest of the season. W. I. Swain was opposition and spent the day on the circus lot, greeting a host of friends. Mr. Swain had a splendid outfit located here, doing a fine business.

"Memphis, Tenn., Sunday and Monday, Sept. 11-12. A long, hot run into this city--the first circus of the season. Business was excellent on Monday (show date) at both matinee and night. The town was just right for a circus of this size, and responded liberally. Along parade and a long haul to the cars at night. Ed C. Knupp, general agent of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, was a visitor here in company with George C. Moyer, general agent.

"Jackson, Tenn. Sept. 13-A county fair in progress here two blocks from circus lot. This, with the hot weather, cut down the attendance somewhat but a good day was registered. The night show started at 7 p. m. as the circus had a long jump of 165 miles out of here to Nashville.

"Nashville, Tenn., Sept. 14. Excellent business matinee and night. Advertising Car No. 1 of the Ringling-Barnum Circus arrived in town, billing Nashville for October 5."

In conclusion the report said that Joe Hodgini, the noted bareback rider, who sustained a broken ankle at Kalamazoo, Michigan on July 6 had fully recovered from his injuries and resumed his place as principal comedian in the big riding act. His place was taken by Cecil Low-

ande during his long absence.

There were no published accounts of the show's dates in Alabama and Georgia other than a small item which said that according to the Birmingham *Age Herald* the show saw large crowds in attendance during its stand on September 17. The daily also gave an excellent after notice.

The show moved into North Carolina as the 22nd week began. Dates in the state came at Asheville, Hickory, Statesville, Winston-Salem, Burlington and Raleigh. The 23rd week likewise saw nothing but North Carolina stands, Greenville, Rocky Mount, Wilson, Washington, Kinston, and New Bern.

At Asheville, on September 26, Walter D. Nealand, the John Robinson press agent, closed with the show and was replaced by Harry Fitzgerald. Nealand went to Chicago where he was to open an agency and manage and organize indoor circuses for a big Chicago company. Nealand stopped by the *Billboard* office in Cincinnati and said that the John Robinson Circus had been doing excellent business of late and would stay out well into November.

It had earlier been reported that business and agricultural conditions in North Carolina were the best of any of the southern states which had lured a batch of circuses during the late summer and fall weeks. John Robinson moved in for some 15 dates. The October 15, *Billboard* said that with the upward jump of the tobacco market throughout North Carolina with average prices much higher than any time since 1919, the John Robinson Circus seemingly "hit" the Carolinas at the opportune time. Aside from the fact that "capital" cities are never figured as the best show towns, the North Carolina capital city, Raleigh, exceeded by far all expectations and gave the show a capacity day's business. Both daily newspapers were loud in their praise of the show.

Other *Billboard* comments included: "Greenville, N. C., Oct 2-3. Comparatively short haul to the new lot adjoining the Fairgrounds. The lot was exactly on the city-county line and easily accessible. Attendance about capacity at both performances. Messers Whitchard and Arthur of The Reflector and News, attended the afternoon performance and the 'after notices' of the Robinson show surely read like they enjoyed the show.

"Rocky Mount, N. C., Oct 4. After a run of forty miles over the Atlantic Coast Line, after transferring from the Norfolk Southern, the show arrived early and everything was up and in readiness on the old Baseball Park long before time for parade. Tobacco market suspended on account of circus day thru the good will of Norman Chambliss, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, and the show enjoyed a good business, both afternoon and night.

"Wilson, N. C., Oct. 5. Arrived early and immense crowds on the streets to witness the parade. Both afternoon and night business was exceptionally good.

"Washington, N. C., Oct. 6-Being an old friend of the John Robinson Circus, Col. Johnathan A. Osborne of The Daily News had this day declared a real holiday owing to the coming to Washington of the Robinson Circus. All city schools were closed and the tobacco

Newspaper ad used by the Robinson show for the Pensacola, Florida date on November 2, 1921. Pfening Archives.

(Season of 1921.)  
**Belmont St. Grounds**  
**WEDNESDAY Nov. 2**  
 John Robinson Proverbs: "Many Men Are Liars." "When a Man Drags About His Honesty, He's Fooling For Your Watch."  
**THE REAL BIG CIRCUS THAT YOU HAVE KNOWN FOR YEARS**

**JOHN ROBINSON'S CIRCUS**

**A National Necessity**  
*Knows in all the world no peer*

- € All the far famed forces of the great Allied World's Amusement Arenas.
- € All the great achievements of Human Daring and Disregard of Danger.
- € All the startling and stupendous sights of the Circus, Museum, Zoological, Spectacular, and Hippodrome World. A continuous whirl of ever changing surprises.
- € The huge arenas filled with flying forms in Unsurpassable Achievements.
- € Stirring Martial Maneuvers, Caravan of Camels, Curious Cattle and other Led Animals.

**Herd of Ponderous Elephants—Hundreds of Beautiful Equines**

**Famous Derby Day Scenes**  
 An Educational Exhibit of Trained Animals  
 From South and Central America and Australia

**Rough Riders**  
**1000 MEN AND WOMEN, 1000 HORSES**  
 and Other Animals Portraying  
**Golden Days and Olden Ways**

**Ragduff Zouaves**  
 In Exhibitions of Drills, Charges and all the Panoply of Actual Warfare

Millions of Dollars Could Not Duplicate Its Collective Wonders  
**3 R.R. Trains—600 Horses**  
**1200 People**  
 A Greater Spectacle of Carcass Than Any Other Show

**TREMENDOUS FREE STREET PARADE**  
 DAILY 11 A.M.  
 A vast Procession of Moving Marvels, including with Color, Music and Glorious Music, once seen to be remembered always.

**2-Performances Daily-2 REDUCED RATES 25¢ ALL DAY**  
 Down Town Ticket Sale Show Day at T. L. Grant & Co. Admission and Reserved Seats Same Prices as on Show Grounds.



market suspended for 'John Robinson Day'! Colonel Osborne cancelled all phones and early morning mail to witness the unloading and the parade of the show, and in company with Mary Mollie Cherry, 84 years young, who still writes her daily column for *The Washington News*, attended the shows. Miss Cherry inscribed her card for the show's press representative in a handwriting worth of a present day newspaper woman. She was a wonderful audience for the show, which was the first circus she saw as a young girl 72 years ago, on the same show grounds in this same city."

The 24th week of the season began with John Robinson still in North Carolina at Wilmington on October 10. The show played Fayetteville the next day then moved into South Carolina at Bennettsville which was followed by other stands in the state at Florence, Charleston, and Orangeburg. To start the 25th week the show moved over into Georgia for Augusta, October 17, then immediately went back to South Carolina to play Columbia, and Spartanburg. A final trip was made into North Carolina for a single stand at Gastonia, October 20, then it returned to South Carolina to finish out the week at Greenville and Anderson.

The November 5, 1921 *Billboard* said that John Robinson was now in the 25th week of successful business. Cotton mills were working full time and business in general was picking up in the South. It further noted: "Augusta, Ga.-Oct 16 and 17th (show date)--The show in early making a long run from Orangeburg, S. C. Business was good."

"Columbia, S. C., Oct 18-Business was big here at both performances. In making the run to Spartanburg the Robinson show passed the Howe show, the latter being on its way from Union to Aiken. S. C."

"Spartanburg, S. C. Oct 19-The Robinson Circus is the only big one to make this town this fall. Two turnaways were recorded."

"Gastonia, N. C., Oct 20-Business good. Ernest Haag was a visitor, his showing being thirty miles away."

"Greenville, S. C., Oct 21-Attendance was big at the matinee performance and a turnaway was done at night."

"Anderson, S. C., Oct 22-This part of the country has been bit with the boll weevil, but the folks were show hungry and as a result the circus did nicely."

It might be mentioned here that the appearance of the boll weevil shortly

after World War II in the South would ultimately change the entire agricultural picture of the region. The boll weevil was deadly to the one-crop cotton farmers. Cotton once was an easy to grow crop which made many a plantation owner rich and provided a fairly good living for his tenants. The appearance of the boll weevil changed all of that. The only way a cotton crop could be grown was to endure the heavy expense of fighting the weevil with arsenic, a



Side show bandwagon No. 43, showing painting on side of lion and jungle scene, in Brantford, Ontario parade in 1921. Pfening Archives.

deadly "pison" as both blacks and whites called it. Only the rich could afford hiring light airplane cropdusters to do the job. The rest had to do the job by hand hoping the "pison" got the boll weevil before it got them. Recalling that as a youth I witnessed his operation many times, I can state that present day government pollution control bureaucrats would have been in hog heaven in those days. In any event the boll weevil emptied the pockets of many a potential circus goer in the south for many years, making it necessary for circus general and special agents to be carefully selective in routing their show, avoiding those areas where the boll weevil was in command.

There was one more South Carolina stand during the 26th week, Greenwood, on October 24. Then the show went into Georgia for dates at Elberton, Athens, Macon, Columbus, and Albany. The show returned to Alabama to start the 27th week at Montgomery, October 31. Andalusia was played the next day, then it was down into Florida for Pensacola and the only stand in that state during 1921. Returning to Alabama the rest of week was spent in the state with stands at Mobile, Selma, and Talladega.

On October 29, 1921 while John Robinson was playing Albany, Georgia great things were happening back in Peru, Indiana for the triumvirate of Jerry Mugivan, Bert Bowers, and Ed Bal-

lard. On that day they closed a real estate deal involving close to \$500,000. They bought 600 acres of land, the circus winterquarters, and the rail car shops for the circus which had been the property of the estate of Benjamin E. Wallace. The quarters, which John Robinson was currently renting, were located three miles east of Peru. Some seven acres were utilized at the quarters site. The *Billboard* which announced the sale to the circus world

said that in all probability both the John Robinson and Howes Great London Circuses would move into the Peru quarters upon conclusion of their current seasons and that after additional buildings were erected as planned, other of the trio's shows would winter there.

The final week of the season, the 28th, started November 7 at Anniston, Alabama which was following by other dates in the state at Gadsden, Tuscaloosa, and Cullman. Cullman, played November 10, was the final stand of the 1921 season.

The last road report from the show came in the November 26, 1921 *Billboard*. It said that John Robinson Circus arrived home in Peru after a long and prosperous season. The homeward bound run was one that would be long remembered by those who made the trip. The show trains made record time, leaving Cullman, Alabama, the closing stand, at midnight, Thursday, and arriving at Peru on Saturday at 7 p. m. The only delay occurred at Louisville, when a truss rod on one of the stock cars broke and after a wait of three hours the management decided to leave the car and proceed with the train to quarters.

The report noted the last few days of the season were very cold, but this did not seem to interfere with business as there was good attendance at Anniston and Tuscaloosa, Alabama. A capacity crowd witnessed the afternoon performance at Cullman.

The article concluded by giving the usual destination of many of the show's troupers following the season's close. It mentioned that the Nelson Family left to spend a much needed rest at their home in Mt. Clemens, Michigan. Strassel's seals were shipped to Jamestown, New York and after a few weeks there Strassel was to play vaudeville dates with the animals.

The show's route book recorded that the total mileage for the 1921 season was 17,769. The summary of events said that one show, second day at Baltimore, was lost on account of a heavy



downpour of rain. The day was lost at Washington, Pennsylvania, as the lot was under water. Two parades were missed on account extreme heat, one at Macomb, Illinois on July 13, and the other at Florence, Alabama on September 15. Actual show days were 168.

The earlier report that Howes Great London would also winter in Peru turned out to be incorrect. That show went into quarters in Montgomery, Alabama. Sells-Floto went back to Denver as usual and Hagenbeck-Wallace to West Baden, Indiana. John Robinson was the only Mugivan-Bowers-Ballard circus to winter in Peru and thus the trio had their four circuses wintering in four

The December 31, 1921 *Billboard* carried the final news from the circus world for the year. A major article said in headlines, "JOHNNY J. JONES SELLS GROUP OF WILD ANIMALS. Receives Tempting Cash Offer from Messers Mugivan, Ballard and Bowers and Accepts--Animals Shipped to Montgomery, Ala." The article dated December 23, from Orlando, Florida said that in what resembled a circus parade a procession of some eight or ten animal cages belonging to the Johnny J. Jones Exposition left winter quarters at the Fair Grounds to load on flat cars at the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad yards. Inquiry of Mr. Jones brought the infor-

ture around the eyes of some of the old-timers."

The article continued saying the Mugivan, Bowers & Ballard syndicate also made Jones a most flattering offer for his three elephants, but he refused to consider it. The cars containing the menagerie left Orlando December 20 bound for Montgomery, where the Howes Great London Circus had winter quarters.

The sale of the Johnny J. Jones wild animals to Mugivan and his partners was indicative of a shift in circus programming that was taking place throughout the industry. In the late teens most of the caged wild animal acts had been in carnivals such as Johnny J. Jones, and although some circuses, notably Al G. Barnes, featured them in its performance, most of the larger shows did not. Starting in the early 20's the caged arena acts would appear in more and more circus programs. These former Johnny J. Jones animals would appear in the Howes Great London performance (although a change of title would take place) in 1922. Ultimately as we shall eventually see the animals would be in the John Robinson program in 1923.

Tradition has long held that shortly after Mugivan and his group purchased the Peru property from the Ben Wallace estate the American Circus Corporation was organized. Stockholders were Jerry Mugivan, Bert Bowers, and Ed Ballard. The date usually given for the formation of the ACC was 1921, although it will be noted that the trade publications were still referring to the trio as a syndicate at the end of the year. In time, however, the American Circus Corporation would become one of the most famous names in circus history.

The 1921 season was now history and the circus world was awaiting the coming of 1922. A hint of what was to come during the next season appeared in the late fall a few weeks before all shows would call it a season and head for the barn. There was labor unrest in the rail industry and a nationwide strike was threatened for November 5 but fortunately was averted. It sent shivers down the spines of all involved in traveling amusements. One vaudeville circuit seriously explored the use of motor transport in case of a strike. Whereas the business depression had been the dreaded word for shows as the 1921 season began it seems that conditions at least in some areas had greatly improved by the time it had ended. And so as the snows of winter came over the land circus owners in the warm barns of their quarters began making plans for another season only a few short months away.



separate locales during the winter of 1921-22.

W. H. McFarland, sideshow manager for John Robinson, placed an advertisement in the December 17, 1921 *Billboard* wanting lady performers who must be good looking and feature high-class wardrobe for the 1922 sideshow. Also wanted was a lady bag puncher, lady sword swallower, lady sword walker, musical act, snake charmer, novelty act, all ladies suitable for a high class sideshow. That wasn't all, as sideshow manager McFarland needed freaks, illusions, nature oddities, chorus girls and burlesque performers and a number of ladies to fit this bill were asked by name to please write. The ad also sought an inside man and assistant who made second openings, colored musicians and comedians, or an organized band. The ad concluded by stressing that ladies must send photos with first letter and when writing to give their address at least three weeks ahead.

A week later Al J. Massey, bandmaster, placed his ad stating that musicians were wanted for the John Robinson Circus Concert Band, Season of 1922. He needed reliable men on all instruments. The best of accommodations were promised. It would be an American Federation of Musicians band.

John Robinson wagons on a lot in 1921. At left is the three den semi-circle den cage and at right the side show bandwagon. Pfening Archives

formation that he had disposed of his "cat family" to the Ballard, Bowers, Mugivan circus syndicate. "My reason for selling these animals," continued Mr. Jones, "are two-fold. First and mainly, I came to the conclusion two years ago that my patrons demanded of me each year comparatively new attractions, and while the wild animal performance was a good strong feature, still it was the same old thing over and over. The trainers might introduce new stunts, but if you were standing on the ballyhoo platform watching the surging crowds you would hear the off-repeated saying, 'Oh, this is the Johnny J. Jones Own Trained Wild Animal Exhibition; it's good, but I've seen it often; let's don't go again.' But my main reason for disposing of my 'pets' lies in the fact that I just could not resist the very tempting cash offer I received for the outfit."

"Guilfoyle and wife, Madame Harriet Guilfoyle, the trainers, have their own home here and are loath to leave the city. Everybody connected with the exposition felt a dread of seeing the 'cats' leave and there was a perceptible mois-



# Helen Wallenda

## WALLENDAS' 60th ANNIVERSARY IN NORTH AMERICA

By Debbie Wallenda

**I**t was Karl Wallenda's youthful daring that brought the Wallenda family to the highwire. But, it was his ambition and drive tempered with gentleness and patience that enabled the man and his family to become the legend that is The Great Wallendas.

For 60 years the Wallenda family has been thrilling audiences in North America with seemingly impossible highwire feats. However, coming to this country at one time seemed more difficult than any trick Karl and his troupe ever imagined.

After booking the Havana, Cuba date in 1927 Karl found himself without a girl to crown his three high pyramid. For a time, his half brother Arthur Grotefent agreed to sport feminine tights and a wig, but only until a girl was found. Especially since the Havana contract stipulated there must be a girl in the act.

Fortunately for the Wallendas, a seventeen year old, petite and feisty Helen Kreis answered Karl's ad in *Das Organ*, looking for a female top mounter.

Having already worked with the Mat-

Karl Wallenda at age 23 shortly after he arrived in the United States in 1928. Wallenda Family collection.



thew family highwire act in Germany since she was fourteen, Helen said she knew she was qualified for the job. All she had to do was join the "Arena Wallenda" on the road. However, upon arriving at the train station she learned the circus had pulled out the day before her arrival.

"There was no one there to meet me, and to make matters worse I had no money. I had missed one train connection and came a day too late. Karl and Willie were there the day before for every train and I wasn't there," Helen said.

Fortunately for her, she said, the station master knew where the circus had moved. "The station master was very, very nice. He knew where they went because the wagons went by rail. . . . He gave me a ticket and told me they were one and a half hours away," she recalled.

When she arrived at the new location, she again asked the station master to direct her to Arena Wallenda, which he did. Upon finally meeting up with the Wallendas Helen said the family took her in and made her comfortable. There was just one problem.

"When I joined the Wallendas, Karl wished I had had no experience with highwire because I was holding the pole all wrong," she said. But after a few adjustments and a few weeks practice, Helen said she stood atop Karl's shoulders as he balanced the chair on a shoulder bar supported by Joe Geiger and Herman Wallenda on the wire.

The four then left Germany late in 1927 to work for Santos y Artigas in Havana. It was there John Ringling had hoped to see the Wallenda highwire troupe that had warranted rave reviews throughout Europe. However, Ringling was not the only one interested in the Wallendas. The owners of Santos y Artigas had brought the Wallendas to Cuba with hopes that the troupe would stay

and travel with the tented circus. But when Karl and the others saw the big top was no where near big enough for the highwire they chose to stay for the Havana date and when finished, return to Germany.

Helen, now Mrs. Helen Wallenda, Karl's widow, is the only surviving member of the original Wallenda highwire troupe and she recalls that time vividly. "That tent was like a horse top on the Ringling show. So Karl said we couldn't work there."

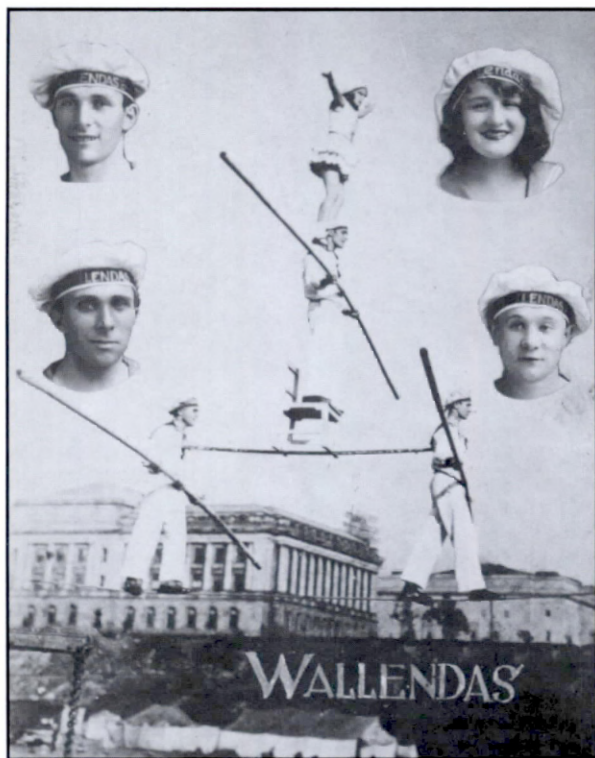
"Still they (Santos y Artigas) tried to hurt us. When Mr. John Ringling came to see our act they wouldn't let us work. When Mr. Ringling asked why the Wallendas weren't working he was told the girl was sick and the boys didn't want to work by themselves, which was a lie, we were told we couldn't work. We weren't even allowed in the theater."

For three days this went on, Helen explained. The owners of the Cuban show had wanted the Wallendas to tour with them or go back to Germany, even though the show had only contracted the act for the Havana date.

Helen Wallenda a few years after she arrived in America. Wallenda Family collection.







The Wallendas in Germany just before coming to the United States. Herman is on left on wire and Joe Geiger is on right. Karl and Helen are on the shoulder bar. Pfening Archives.

Fortunately John Ringling "smelled a rat," she said. He said goodbye to the show owners and headed for the docks to catch his boat to America. "The show took him to the boat," Helen recalled, and watched until he was clearly away from the docks. But, Ringling, determined to see the Wallendas, paid the captain to return to the docks and let him off again.

"Ringling waited until we worked. He had a stooge who took his cap off when we went up on the wire. Ringling went back in. The show was shocked when John Ringling walked back in. He watched the act and went immediately backstage and cornered Karl and all of us and asked if we wanted to go to America and the Greatest Show on Earth.

"He gave us a contract right away and tickets to New York. Santos and Artigas were determined they were going to ship us back to Germany. They called the police and said my parents had only given me permission to go to Havana, not the United States, they were responsible and I had to go back to Germany.

"But Karl was no dummy, he went to the American Consulate in Havana, showed them our contract for Ringling

Brothers, and showed them the permit he got from my parents to travel with them," Helen said.

The American Consulate phoned Germany at Karl's expense and got approval from Helen's family and the troupe was on its way to America; no one could stop them.

The Wallendas' first date with Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey was at Madison Square Garden where they worked so high Helen said it scared her to look down. The troupe received a thunderous ovation, stopping the show for eleven minutes.

"When we worked you could have heard a pin drop. . . . After the three high we came down and believe me, it was just ear busting," she said.

That began sixteen years with the Ringling-Barnum show. At times the Wallendas worked in a display with The Grotefents, consisting of Karl's step father George Grotefent, his half brother Arthur Grotefent, Helen's sister Yetty Kreis and two others, all of whom had worked with Karl while he was still in Europe.

Such success was accompanied by jealousy from other performers. This was no new problem for the Wallendas as they had faced the same thing in Germany. But no such problems arose within the act itself.

When something didn't feel right in the act, there was no arguing or blaming each other. They simply lowered the shoulder bar and poles to the ground and practiced on the stage, Helen said.

There was one time, Helen recalled, when Herman wanted to do a back somersault on a specially built shoulder bar on the highwire.

"It was fantastic," she said, "but he slipped a couple of times in practice and he hung and several times they all came off of the practice wire. Karl said, 'That's out.'"

Herman insisted and Karl refused. Even after weeks and weeks of practice Herman only made the trick two out of three times, she said.

"Herman was very upset. He said (to Karl) 'You just want to be in the lime-light all the time. You won't let me do anything,'" Helen said. So Karl, to compromise and please everyone told Herman to try a back rollover on the

shoulder bar, which he did successfully in the act.

As a leader Karl was perfect, Helen said, "He was never rough, he never yelled at us. He was always kind and gentle. He never lost his temper. He would always say let's try again and ask 'Are you all for it?'"

At one point in Blackpool, England, Helen told Karl of a dream she had. She was sitting on Herman's shoulders and another woman sat on Joe's shoulder and Karl did a handstand on the girl's heads. Helen said she was excited that she had an idea that Karl wanted to practice for the act. The next day they did practice it on the ground and were successful. But, Karl messed up the girls' hair in the process.

"We didn't like that," she chuckled. "But, if we told Karl that we didn't like the trick because he messed up our hair, he wouldn't care one bit. So, the next time he did the headstand we walked around with stiff necks."

When Karl inquired as to why the girls had sore necks, Helen said they told him it was because of his handstand on their heads. So, he immediately stopped practicing the trick.

"It looked fantastic," she said, "But our pompadours!"

After Helen became Karl's wife in 1935 she continued to share his ambition to be the best. She said she just hoped she could do whatever idea he came up with.

In 1947 the Wallendas left Ringling and joined with the Grotefents to create their own show and the famous seven person pyramid. "The whole trick was really not as dangerous as it looked for

Karl and Helen Wallenda with daughter Carla around 1937. Wallenda Family collection.





experienced wirewalkers, but it took a lot of coordination from everybody. If one guy would be out of step it would mess the whole thing up," she said. "Karl always said if we didn't feel up to it, that we couldn't hold the trick, just get into the platform. Everybody had the right to say no, let's go in. . . . No one was ever forced. Karl always asked if we were up to it."

Helen recalled that on windy days, or days when someone was sick, instead of the seven, they did the two high on the chair on bikes.

She continued with her husband and the seven person pyramid until 1959, when she retired. She said people used to come to Karl all the time asking to learn highwire and be a part of his act. "Always people came and said they would like to be in the highwire act. . . . He tried them out for a month or so. Sometimes they would disappear after three days and to some Karl would say, Look, you're not cut out for it." she said.

When the seven person pyramid came down in Detroit in 1962 Helen said, "I was horrified. You could not blame any one person in the entire troupe. It was just one of those things. Every performer, I don't care what you do, wheth-

Helen and Karl Wallenda at Show-folks of Sarasota in February 1977. Cliff Glotzbach photo.



The Grotfents on left and Wallendas on right on Ringling-Barnum in 1935. Pfening Archives.

er you're an acrobat on the ground or an aerialist or whatever, anything can happen, any time. . . . It's a chance you take."

"Karl used to say God has two pages in his book. One says when you're born and the next page says when you die and how you die and you cannot avoid it. Karl was really a fatalist."

Helen said she understood, after suffering three falls in her own career she was never deterred or scared. "I don't know why. Just like they say the show must go on. I still don't know why after all these years."

She said she still thinks back on Karl's fatal accident in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1978. "I can't see how it happened. . . . It was a terribly windy day. . . . When he did it that day something looked funny to me, he wasn't himself. But then I always think back to what Karl believed, when your time comes, it comes," she said.

"It devastated the family for a time. But Karl used to say when things look the worst you have to take the bull by the horns and don't let him take you. The family all went back to what they were supposed to do, what they were taught to do. I guess it made them all a little bit more careful too."

"Karl was a performer from head to toe," she recalled. "The way he died was the way he wanted to die. He always said he didn't want to die in bed."

Karl left a legacy for his family. "Not all of them like the highwire that much," she said. "Some quit, some have other jobs. Some like to live off of Karl's name and I know that. I don't think there will be a second Karl Wallenda, no way. They all respect and admire him

and try to do their best. They all had their teaching from Karl. They all know to respect the wire, don't get careless and carried away with things."

"I wouldn't be disappointed if my great-grandchildren don't go into highwire. Because this is one job you cannot force someone into. If they really like it, they'll go into it whether you like it or not. We don't tell them they

have to or that they shouldn't, they have their own choice."

*Debbie Wallenda is the wife of Enrico Wallenda, grandson of Helen and Karl Wallenda. They will appear as the Great Wallendas at the Circus World Museum from May to September 1988.*

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# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING

Season of 1881  
BY ORIN C. KING

## CHAPTER 3 PART TWO

**J.** M. Hudson and Dan Castello have united their circus enterprises for the coming season," according to the *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 28. "Hudson's organization has been known heretofore as the 'Great North and South American circus,' and Castello's as the great New York show. They have engaged a full company, Hudson making his headquarters in St. Louis, and Castello at Peoria, Illinois. Hudson is a circus manager of long experience. Castello is a clown and a leading circus man of national reputation. Hudson and Castello's circus will leave Peoria, Ill., with a train of thirty cars carrying their outfit for the mining regions of the west about April 15. They expect to close the season in St. Louis on their return."

The names of Hudson and Castello disappeared from the *Topeka papers*, and there is no indication of the outcome of the new venture.

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"The advertising car of Cole's circus passed through Emporia Tuesday, over the Santa Fe, on its way east," reported the *Weekly News*, June 30. "It is finished in the most superb style and is quite a marvel in the general convenience of its appointments." The advance was in charge of Louis E. Cooke, who billed Emporia for Friday, July 15.

Cole advertised his New Gigantic Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Congress of Living Wonders and Academy of Trained Animals as the "Only Show to Circumnavigate the Earth" picking up along the way "A Perfect Flood of Amazing Novelties."

New on the program were Moari War Dancers, Genuine Bedouin Arabs, Necromancers of India, Hindoo Snake Charmers, East India Jugglers and Dancers, and the "Original and only Australian Blondin" on the high wire. Other attractions were staples from previous shows and had been featured for years, including the "Best Performing Stallions in the World," "a Spanish Performing Bull," and the "Mammoth Kansas Ox."

The *News* ignored the parade and exhibitions of July 15th. The most information is contained in a handout published July 14, in the *Weekly News*.

"From the San Francisco *Daily Call*.

"The steamship City of Sidney,



which arrived on Wednesday last from Australia, brought back to the United States the most gigantic and stupendous enterprise that ever was conceived and successfully carried out by any one man in the history of the show business. It seems almost an impossibility for an organization of such magnitude as W. W. Cole's monster exhibition, embracing as it does so many varied features--circus, menagerie, museum, trained animals of all descriptions, and a small

The W. W. Cole New and Massive Shows, Mammoth Circus and Menagerie used this ad during the 1881 season. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise noted.

This steel engraving letterhead used in 1881 illustrated the Asian tour of the W. W. Cole show.

army of male and female performers, attendants and trainers--to make a tour of foreign lands, but it has been successfully accomplished. A distance of 28,000 miles by land and sea has been traversed, and instead of the mammoth combination dwindling away or contracting in any particular, as might reasonably be presumed, it has greatly expanded its former proportions. In addition to the original attractions, new wonders and marvels have been secured in every land, and in every clime, many of which have never been exhibited in

America or Europe. On the voyage to Australia storms and rough weather was experienced, and many of the animals were seasick, and presented the most comical and woebegone expression conceivable. The elephants, however, stood the voyage like old sea-dogs, and maintained the same complacent solidity that they do on land. It is a curious fact and one not generally known, that the peculiar swaying motion which the elephant exhibits in walking, is not his natural gait, but is acquired by means of a sea voyage, and he retains the motion ever afterward. In other words, having once got his sea-legs on, the motion is so pleasing, and so well adapted to his lazy, cumbersome body, that he adopts it forever.

"The tour through the Australian colonies was the most remarkable success ever chronicled in the history of the country. In nearly every city in which exhibitions were giv-

SATURDAY MORNING, OCT. 1, 1881

Just from Australia, and other Distant Lands

AT PORTLAND, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8.

The Biggest and Best in any Country and Clime.

**W. W. COLE'S**

**MAMMOTH CIRCUS AND MENAGERIE.**

Everything new and interesting. South Sea Savages. Natives of Every Nation. Tattooed Maories, a snow white Buffalo, Aerial Bicycle Riding, 14 Acts by Lady Artists; the Best Performing Stallions in the World.

More men, horses, animals and more novelties than any Show extant. Will visit all principal points in Canada. Now en route to Europe and the United Kingdom. Special cheap excursions on all railroads and steamboats.

Admission, 50 c. Children under 10, half price.

Also will Exhibit at

BANGOR, MONDAY, OCTOBER 3.

BELFAST, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4.

WATERTOWN, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5.

GARDNER, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6.

BRUNSWICK, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7.



en, the crowds that thronged around the ticket office to obtain admission were so great that the office had to be closed, and thousands had to be turned away unable to gain admission by reason of the immense numbers that had preceded them. In Adelaide, five performances were given, and upwards of 50,000 persons attended, which is without precedent in the annals of the city. The receptions in the colonial cities amounted to popular ovations, and the government officials issued proclamations, granting half holidays, that the citizens might witness the grand pageant as it passed through the streets. Pre-eminent among the many new and rare attractions procured by Mr. Cole during the foreign tour is a troupe of South Sea savages, or Maori war dancers, the first and only ones ever on exhibition. These savages, from the Cannibal Islands, are tattooed from head to foot, and in their performances produce, with thrilling effect, their war songs and dances, and exhibit other characteristics of cannibal life.

"A drove of giant kangaroos has also been secured, and these curious animals, found only in Australia, will be viewed with interest. Many rare and beautiful exotic birds have been added to the collection, and a troupe of Bedouin Arabs from Palestine perform the many strange and acrobatic feats for which the sinewy and muscular tribe are world famous. This mammoth affair will exhibit in Emporia, Friday, July 15, 1881."

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A former partner of Dan Castello--W. C. Coup--figured big in the circus news of Kansas in 1881. Nothing had gone quite right for Coup following his innovations of 1872 on the Barnum show. He quarreled with Barnum concerning the use of Barnum's name by other Barnum partners on other circuses. He established a huge aquarium in New York City which he surrendered to another partner in another dispute.

W. C. Coup's New United Monster Shows proved to be his last chance at the big time--and he failed again.

The show that Coup brought to Topeka, Friday, July 22, was truly impressive and exuded an aura of opulence. Everything was of the best.

Advertising car No. 1 under the direction of N. L. Pearly was in Topeka July 5, on a siding at the Union Pacific depot. The *Journal* described the car as "simply a palace on wheels, and number two will be here next Friday."

Preparations began nearly a month earlier. On June 10, A. Haight, advance agent and general manager of advertising, paid a visit to the *Journal*, placed

a few ads, dropped a few handouts, and moved on to Kansas City.

Car No. 2 did not arrive on Friday, but came July 13. Frank J. Pilling was in charge. At Pilling's invitation reporters were invited to "take something" and inspect the car on the siding at the Union Pacific depot.

"This car is a beautiful vehicle," the *Journal* reported, "fitted up in excellent shape, perfect in its appointments and elegant in its equipments."

The reporter for the *Commonwealth* made a story of considerable length from his visit with Pilling.

"Fully seventy men precede by weeks the visit of Mr. Coup's shows to a city like this," he (Pilling) replied, "that is of agents and employees. I am doing the final advertising--putting up new paper entirely, although the city has been posted once, and I sent a number of rigs loaded with bills and men into the county for the same purpose this morning."

One should keep in mind a press agent's obligation to inflate his show when we consider Pilling's answer to the reporter's question, "What does it cost to run your show?"

"We have employed in connection with our monster establishment, five hundred men and women, four hundred and seventy-five horses, fourteen principal advance agents, twenty-one assistant agents, three advertising cars, nine bands of music, one hundred musicians, one hundred cages and chariots, one hundred principal performers, two hundred auxiliaries, three circus rings, or four, including the ring in the vast hippodrome, which is nearly half a mile around."

Pilling claimed the show could seat 14,000.

The answer as to the cost of operating the show increased in confusion the more Pilling talked.

"Our canvas men average \$40 per month each, including three 'bosses.' 'We have fifty more than any other show in existence, and they are usually paid \$18, the difference in salary alone, exclusive of board, would be \$6,300, adding the board, \$1 per day for each man (of course we are speaking of laboring men) in camp--the tented season being thirty weeks or 210 days--and we have \$10,500. Add to these 20 canvas and property men for dressing room, which is about the average number of men used by other shows for all tents, and we give you figures of some proportions, \$5,000 and \$4,200."

Lulu had the highest salary on the show but the amount is not mentioned.

WAIT-LOOK FOR THE DATE-WAIT

## W. C. COUP'S MAMMOTH, MONSTER UNITED SHOWS

Circus, Menagerie, Museum, Aviary, Aquarium,  
and Real Paris Hippodrome.

**MIGHTIEST, GRANDEST  
GREATEST COMBINATION  
ON THE GLOBE.**

WILL EXHIBIT AT  
**ATCHISON, JULY 18**  
Not Coming Until  
**MONDAY.**

During the short time Mr. W. C. COUP has been before the public, with Shows bearing his own name, he has received more favorable press notices than any three other Shows which were ever on the road. Nobody doubts it! YOU ALL KNOW IT! DON'T YOU? Could this be done unless he had the best Show? You know it could not.

THEN, DID YOU EVER SEE



**LULU**  
WONDERFUL LEAP OF 100 FEET  
Startling Performers of New Chariots

**THERE ARE 3 CIRCUS RINGS**

WITH PERFORMANCES IN EACH, requiring three companies; around the Three there is a GREAT HIPPODROME TRACK in which are seen the COSTUMES OF ALL NATIONS and more magnificent wardrobe than can be seen in any three other shows; COUP'S HIT on the TIGER--BARKER on Chariots; ASKEFIELD on Farmer President, carrying a Hoe, in former dress; GULL carrying a Telegraph Pole; VANDERBILT with Unadorned, besides all other characters all equally well known; besides, there will be seen TWO and FOUR HORSE HIPPODROME CHARIOTS and ROMAN STANDING RACES, HURDLE and STEEPLE CHASES, THE WONDERFUL CHASE FOR A WIFE.

BY THE INCOMPARABLE  
MAUD OSWALD AND A WHOLE TRIBE OF GENUINE INDIANS

**A ZULU**  
AND  
**INDIAN RACE**  
And don't forget that you may see there the  
**ONLY FEMALE ZULUS**  
ever brought to America.



**POSITIVELY MORE PERFORMERS**  
Than ever before seen with any Three Shows on the Globe, and more than Two Ordinary Circuses. Do you hear that?

**THAT BAND of COUP'S**  
COUNT THE DIFFERENT KINDS, AND IF NOT SO, DON'T PATRONIZE HIM  
READ THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS BILL.

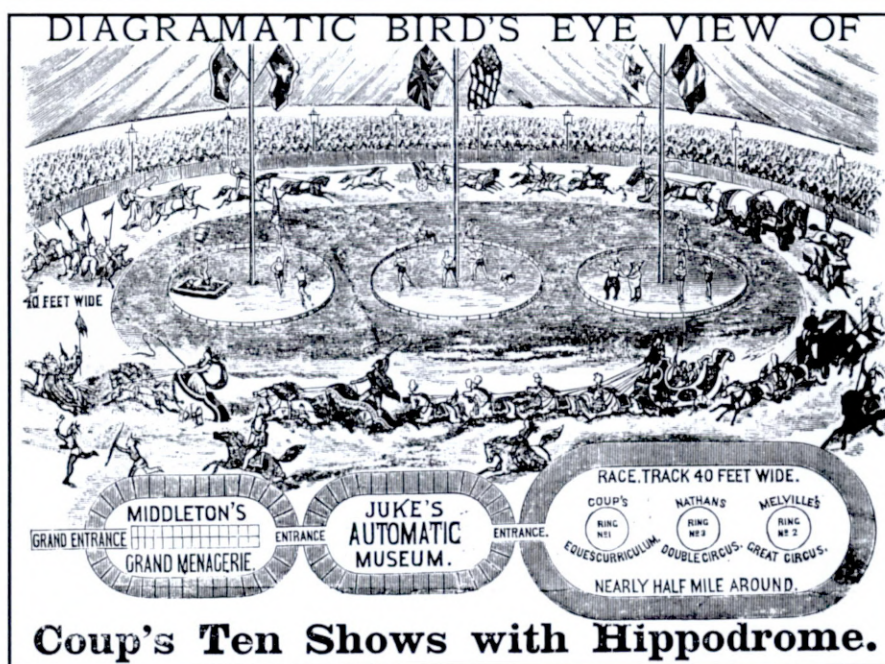
The W. C. COUP'S Mammoth Show Printing and Sporting Shows, Chicago.

The big feature of the W. C. Coup Circus in 1881 was Lulu, in the wonderful leap of 100 feet. This herald was issued for the Atchinson, Kansas date on July 18.

Kate Stokes received \$200 a week. E. W. Fryer, horse trainer, received \$250 per week. The salaries of two other horse trainers, Robert White and S. C. Stokes, were not reported.

About 100 top employees, according to Pilling, were boarded at hotels at an average of \$1.50 per day, about \$31,500 for the season. Added to the





400 men fed on the lot at a dollar a day or \$84,000 for the season, the total board bill claimed by Pilling is \$115,500. Pilling failed to disclose the pay of teamsters, musicians, assistant managers, train crews, and advance agents, although he did list them, but by this time Pilling was talking of \$318,755.

"Come with me," said Mr. Pilling, "and take a look at the car. It is nearly sixty feet long, and of the ordinary width. See," he added, opening one of a series of doors lining one side of the car, "all of the compartments are filled with show bills and placards of various descriptions. Thirteen thousand dollars worth of posters are at this moment in this car."

If Mr. Pilling was speaking truth (which he was not), it is difficult to understand why it took Coup so long to go broke.

The press department handed out a long list of Coup's accomplishments under the heading of "Who is Coup?"

"On the 22nd day of July, W. C. Coup's New United Monster Shows, which have been increased by the addition of ten other shows, with their well known managers as assistants, will exhibit in Topeka, giving two performances afternoon and evening.

"Now, the general public may ask, who is this man Coup, whom the papers say has literally revolutionized the show business? Well, we will briefly tell you as we learn it:

"Coup is the man who has originated most of the largest shows of the world, including the great show 1871 (and for which another received the credit).

This illustration of the W. C. Coup arena and tent layout appeared on the back cover of the 1881 courier.

"Coup is the man who, in 1872, organized the first railroad show, and built the first sleeping passenger, box and palace stock cars ever owned by any show in the world, and proof refers to Mr. Brill, car builder, Wilmington, Del.

"Coup is the man who, in 1874 astonished the country with his immense traveling hippodrome.

"Coup is the man who sold his interest in the Hippodrome, and, in 1876, erected the famous New York Aquarium.

"Coup is the man who projected the Madison Square Garden in New York City, and which is the largest amusement building in the world.

"Coup is the man who organized the renowned Equescurriculum in 1878, and which was everywhere recognized as the acme canvas entertainment in point of gentility, merit and refinement.

"Coup is the man to whom the public and profession are most indebted for all the radical improvements in the show profession in the last decade."

Altogether the story carried seventeen such statements attesting to the greatness of W. C. Coup. The handout appeared in the *Capital* on July 7, next to a column about an even greater miracle worker, Lydia E. Pinkham whose Vegetable Compound was a positive cure for all the infirmities of womanhood and "will dissolve and expel tumors from the uterus in an early stage of development. The tendency to cancerous hu-

mors there is checked very speedily by its use."

Coup advertised some features that seem strange a hundred years later, the strangest of which was the \$100,000 ZULU BABY, The only one ever born in America. He is a four day old Savage--the pet of the Ladies, the pride of the tribe."

The newspaper ads proclaimed that, "This is the Show that has Miss Katie Stokes, the \$20,000 handsomest woman in the world," but never is there an explanation of how she was chosen, or the significance of the \$20,000.

Mentioned were "Wild Australian Boomerang Throwers," in exactly four words.

More space was devoted to the Hippodrome, "A Roman Race Track, 40 Feet Wide and nearly a Half Mile around." The show staged an abundance of races, "Chariot Races, Flat Races, Hurdle Races, Steeple Chasing, Standing Races, Roman Races, Indian Chase for a Wife."

Advertised were "The Royal Princess Amaxula and Suite, Daughter of King Cetewayo of Zululand; NETTIE, The Greatest Leaping Horse in the World, who jumps over five large horses and a five barred gate; Mlle. Geraldine, who makes a frightful headlong dive of Ninety Feet from the top of the canvas; and Mlle. Zaco, who descends by the hair from the top of the canvas on an invisible wire."

Lulu, "The Intensely Thrilling European Sensation" topped the bill.

"A human being terrifically hurled through the air from a huge iron Catapult, attaining an altitude of Ninety Feet, and descending a semi circle of nearly Two Hundred Feet, a daring blood curdling act, never before accomplished."

The great show arrived from Lawrence about four o'clock on the Union Pacific and moved rapidly to the lot between Eighth and Ninth streets on Madison. The city received \$150 for granting the privilege of showing in Topeka. Two engines were required to move the train of forty cars, according to the *Capital*.

While Harry Evarts, press agent, made the rounds of the newspaper offices, paying bills, making friends and handing out passes, Coup and his treasurer, H. McCartney, were checking into the Fifth Avenue hotel along with 40 other members of the troupe.

Coup carried on the show a private detective, Richard Baker in some stories and H. D. Baker in others, who made early contact with Topeka's Marshal Cochran. Baker pointed out three pick pockets who had been an embar-



**COLUMBUS,  
SATURDAY, MAY 21.  
W. C. COUP'S COLOSSAL SHOW!**  
FIVE TIMES LARGER THAN EVER!  
One Thousand Overwhelming New Features!  
Positively Seen in No Other Show on Earth.



**INCREDIBLE COMBINATION WITH  
FARINI'S GREAT PARIS HIPPODROME!**  
With a magnificent Four-horse Roman Chariot Race Track, 40 feet wide, nearly half-mile around, containing nearly 200 Chariots, Horses and Hippodrome Features, and requiring for this special department  
**50 DISTINGUISHED RIDERS OF ALL NATIONS.**  
Requiring the Use of  
**50 4 Great Circus Kings and the Employment of 3 Great Circus Co's.**  
Composed of nearly Two Hundred Male and Female Performers. The first and only show in the world that ever used NINE KINDS OF MUSIC, including four gigantic Steam Power Musical Orchestras. And the Sublimagician Chariot of Enem-  
**osyne**, whose thundering symphonies are fully equal to the combined melodies of 1,500 Skillful Musicians.  
**LARGEST SHOW TENT IN THE WORLD**  
Larger than 12 shows combined, in which will be witnessed Hippodrome Races, Chariot Races, Roman Races, Jockey Races, Flat Races, Staircase Races, Steeple and Hurdle Races. The first and only Hippodrome in the world that was ever exhibited in connection with a first-class Museum. Three Grand Circus Companies and a Menagerie of nearly a thousand trained horses and wild animals. The Great Hippodrome tent alone requires 200 laborers and horses to raise it.  
**A fair simile of the Famous New York Obelisk.**

This 1881 W. C. Coup newspaper ad included Farini's Great Paris Hippodrome. It stated the show had 1000 new features not seen on any other show on earth.

rassment to the show, and, as the *Journal* put it, "they were marched out of town."

The *Journal* on show day was full of information and advice:

"The show windows along Kansas avenue look like in a picture gallery."

"Hands on your pocketbooks."

"Red lemonade flowed in rivers today."

"The street cars did a smashing business today."

"Several suspicious looking parties who were thought to carry concealed fire arms, were taken to the police station and relieved of their weapons until ready to start home."

"Mayor Wilson," according to the *Commonwealth*, "did a wise act in putting on seven extra policemen yesterday. The Marshal mounted two of his force for more efficient service while the circus was in town."

"At a very early hour," the *Journal*, July 22, reported, "the surrounding county began to give up its living humanity until by noon, there was no estimating any ways accurately the size of the throng that crowded these streets. It is well know that an occasion of the kind brings forth every person within a radius of twenty mile, who can possibly, by the least bit of strate-

gy, get here at all. And along the railroads many come from a much greater distance, every train bringing hundreds from different cities and towns. Suffice to say that the stupendous tents of the show which seats 14,000 people, was crowded full at this afternoon's performance and they were more than delighted with the rendition of the program offered them."

The *Journal* estimated matinee attendance at about 14,000. The *Capital* estimated 10,000. The *Commonwealth* reported, July 23, that "At the afternoon performance, notwithstanding the great heat, the immense amphitheater was will filled with spectators, the lowest estimate which The *Commonwealth* reporter heard made upon the unprecedented multitude thus gathered being, five thousand."

Which estimate should one believe?

The parade came promptly at ten o'clock and all the papers agreed that the crowd on Kansas avenue was immense.

The *Commonwealth*, commenting on the size of the crowd attracted to the parade, stated, "By ten o'clock a.m. from hundreds of farm wagons and vehicles of various descriptions had been unloaded the wives and children of a goodly number of Shawnee county farmers, the throngs of well-dressed, smiling faced young and old upon Kansas avenue causing that thoroughfare to present an unwonted bustling and animated appearance. With this large class of our population it was evident that the uppermost thought was that the day should prove one of unmixed enjoyment, and those who know how little of variety enters into the life of the farmer or his household can readily appreciate the zest with which such occasions, occurring so rarely, are welcomed by them."

The *Commonwealth* reporter was strongly impressed by the trapeze performance of Mlle. Geraldine.

"Her aerial flight from the top of the lofty pavilion to the slender netting spread out within a few feet of the ground, was something marvelous, causing the vast assemblage to hold their breath in amazement and suspense. Standing at least sixty feet above the auditorium, the intrepid girl hurls herself through the air, and after

several graceful evolutions, she slights upon the netting, when, bounding to her feet unhurt, she makes her bow to the audience."

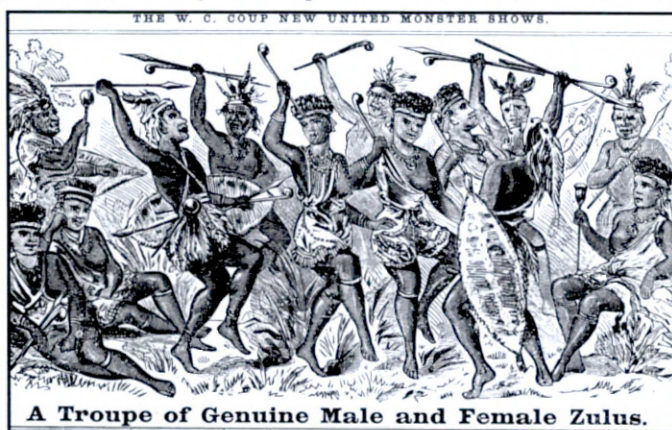
The *Commonwealth* considered the act of Lulu to be "even a more hazardous performance. While in mid-air Lulu achieves three revolutions--something that has never before been attempted upon the boards."

The *Capital* reported that, "The menagerie consisted of a large number of valuable animals, the huge hippopotamus, or water horse, attracting the most attention. The circus department was just as represented, the three great novelties--the Zulus, the flying Lulu and the Indian chase for a bride--all attracted great applause. The two-horse racing and the chariot racing were all quite exciting. One of the riders of horses struck a pole while dashing around the ring at a breakneck speed last evening, and though thrown to the ground was not seriously injured and soon mounted again."

"The show is a truly great one, and is having a season of unprecedented success."

A few Topekans took advantage of show day by setting up refreshment stands as close to the big top as the showmen would allow. Bennet Hatcher and his brother, two black Topeka men, established a lemonade stand near the circus. All Topeka papers were in agreement up to that point, but from there on the news reports varied widely.

The *Capital* reported that Baker, Coup's detective, forced the men to



**A Troupe of Genuine Male and Female Zulus.**

A group of "genuine" male and female Zulus were pictured in the 1881 Coup courier. Depicting partially topless women was most unusual for the time.

move their business several times. The *Commonwealth* stated that the fracas did not begin until after the men had moved their stand entirely off the show grounds. The *Journal* claimed that Hatcher and Company refused to



**THE TOWERING GIANT CONSOLIDATION!**

1881. **P. T. BARNUM'S** 1881.

**GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH**

AND THE GREAT **LONDON CIRCUS**

1881. 1881.

**SANGER'S ROYAL BRITISH MENAGERIE** AND **THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIED SHOWS**

Combined for an Experimental Tour the Season of 1881.

**\$3,000,000**  
DAILY EXPENSES \$4,500  
3 EXHIBITIONS EVERY DAY  
IN 3 DISTINCT RINGS

**20 ELEPHANTS**  
INCLUDING ONE OF  
THE ONLY BABY ELEPHANT

A HARBINGER OF  
**20 CAMELS**

**CHANG**  
THE CHINESE GIANT

**CONGRESS: MIGHTY GIANTS**  
**GIANT STEER**  
**GIANT HORSE**  
**2 GIANT SEA LIONS**  
**2 GIANT POLAR BEARS**  
**GIANT GIRAFFES**  
**GIANT INDIAN RHINOCEROS**  
**GIANT OSTRICH**  
**WRESTLING CHAMPIONS**  
**SIXTY & SEVENTY**  
**GIANT ELEPHANT, CHIEFTAIN**  
**24 CHARIOTS**  
**TALLY-HO COACH.**

**GEN. TOM THUMB AND WIFE**  
AFTER THE FASHION OF THE  
100 DENS LAIRS AND VANS  
**4 CIRCUS COMPANIES**  
OF THE MOST FAMOUS  
BARDNER & BACHELLER'S & BATTLE  
**THREE TRAINS**  
INCLUDING YARDS OF WATER-FROG TENTS  
**20 TRICK STALLIONS**  
**STREET PARADE**  
ADMISSION AS USUAL

This 1881 Barnum and London one sheet poster is printed on heavy mat paper in full color using wood block plates.

comply with Baker's demands and eventually "opened out with a tirade of abuse and bad names which was resented by Baker."

In the next round the *Journal* reported that Hatcher charged Baker with a tent stake in a hand to hand encounter. "He

hit the detective twice over the head and once over his spine, each time inflicting the most serious and dangerous of wounds."

According to the *Commonwealth*, "The colored man struck the detective with a board injuring him considerably. He (Baker) attempted to draw his pistol, but a white man, a bystander, seeing this movement, knocked him down to keep him from shooting in the crowd. During the melee the pistol went off."

The version in the *Capital* stated, "Baker thereupon drew a revolver, which Hatcher seeing, at once struck out with a club that landed athwart Baker's back. J. W. Fuller, who was standing near, noticing that Baker was going to shoot, though surrounded by a crowd of upwards of 5,000 persons, rushed in and snatched the revolver from Baker's hand and threw him to the ground, the revolver going off in the melee, the ball burying in the ground at Fuller's feet."

All accounts agree that the black men fled, but were captured and taken to jail and later released on bond. Baker was found to be severely injured and was taken to Dr. Stringfield's home for treatment. The doctor was quoted by the *Capital* as saying that, "Mr. Baker is paralyzed from the blow and has also received internal injuries, and may not be able to travel for some time."

The case came to trial the following morning, and as no one appeared against Hatcher and his brother, the case was dismissed. Baker was too injured to appear and Coup apparently thought the affair not worth bothering about.

On August 10, the *Journal* reported that, "Richard Baker, the detective of Coup's show, has so far recovered from his injuries that he left Topeka this afternoon for his home in the east, Patterson, N. J."

A tale of wrong doing with a happier ending was related in the *Journal*, July 28. "The day W. C. Coup was here one of his showmen stole a hammock from W. H. Jenkins' door yard. Mr. Jenkins went to Coup and informed him of the fact and was promised that the matter should be attended to. Today the stolen article was returned to its owner, by express, with charges paid, from a town way down in Missouri."

An enigmatic short paragraph appeared in the *Commonwealth*, January 5, 1883. "Some gentleman has rented and fixed up an office in the Sexton

building. He is engaged in laying out a route for Coup's circus on the Pacific slope." There was never anything more on the story.

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On May 16, 1881, the *Journal* announced the coming to Topeka of P. T. Barnum. "Barnum, with his grand combined consolidation shows exhibiting feats of strength and skill by men and animals, dancing elephants and prancing horses, ground tumbling and aerial somersaults, is coming this way." No date was given.

J. W. Hamilton and a brigade of bill posters was in Topeka on July 18, and papered the town. Perhaps the date was not posted in the middle of July, or perhaps the *Journal* in its excitement made an error, but the paper cited August 13 as the day "P. T. Barnum will be here in all of his oriental and continental magnificence. Don't forget the date."

August came and went without Barnum, but on Monday, September 26, the *Journal* reported, "P. T. Barnum's advertising car No. 1, with H. C. Hodges in charge, stood at the Santa Fe depot all of Saturday, while a corps of men hung banners over the county."

On September 26, W. W. Duran, press agent and advertising manager, "a pleasant gentleman, an old one of the craft, having been city editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*," visited the *Journal* and arranged for ads to run on eight days beginning Wednesday, September 28.

Show day was now clearly declared to be Wednesday, October 12.

It was a particularly uninspired advertisement that ran in the Topeka papers. The point of greatest interest to the fans of a hundred years later is the title at the head of the columns.

"P. T. BARNUM ON THE WAY!

with his own

GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH!

and the

GREAT LONDON CIRCUS!

SANGER'S ROYAL BRITISH MENAGERIE

and the

GRAND INTERNATIONAL ALLIED SHOWS, United for this season only and now inaugurating an experimental tour of the whole country at the daily expense of \$4,500. P. T. Barnum, J. A. Bailey & J. L. Hutchinson, Sole Owners."

For the first time, Barnum and Bailey were linked in a joint enterprise.

The advertisement featured "THE SEVEN GIANT WONDERS," but failed to elucidate. Chang, the Chinese Giant and the "original GENERAL TOM THUMB AND WIFE," were the only performers mentioned.

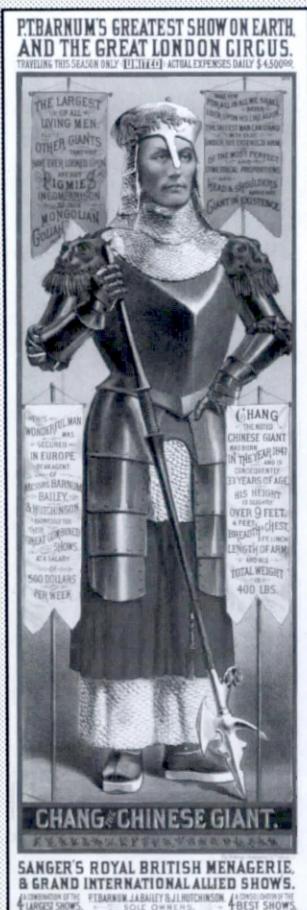
Tuesday, October 11, the show played





## THE MAGNIFICENT LITHOGRAPHS OF THE 1881 BARNUM AND LONDON SHOW

For the first season of the combined P. T. Barnum and Great London Circus, Sanger's Royal British Menagerie the show contracted with the Strobridge Lithograph Company of Cincinnati, Ohio to design and produce a number of outstanding new posters. A collection of the 1881 posters are shown here. These examples are from the Circus World Museum and the Pfening Archives.





Atchison, and on Thursday, October 13, Leavenworth.

Early in the season a strong feature of the performance had been the catapulting of Lizzie Davene through the air and into a net. On May 3, at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, according to the *Capital*, June 7, "she failed to time her somerset exactly right, and fell partly upon her head. She straightened out upon the netting and asked for help, saying in a low voice, 'I cannot move hand or foot.' She was carried to her dressing room, and a physician found that she was paralyzed in all her limbs. She was removed to the New York hospital, where she died on Friday (June 3)."

The *Commonwealth* advised its readers on show day to "Lock Your Houses. The circus will be here today, and there will be many followers with it. We advise everybody to lock house and stable doors all day. It will be a wise precaution."

The *Capital* ran the following, October 12: "Warning. Pinkerton's Detective Agency has sent out a circular to the authorities of the cities and towns along the line of the route of Barnum's circus, cautioning them to put every obstacle in the way of the large loose following which accompanies this gigantic show plying their swindling avocations under the guise of peddling operations. The public are particularly cautioned about leaving their houses to go on to the street, without every precaution as to the safety of their doors and windows."

"The circus is here," the *Journal* reported, October 12. "It arrived this morning. Came over the Santa Fe road from Atchison. It required two large trains of cars to transport this aggregation. The show has its tents erected on the square bounded by Eighth street on the north, Jefferson on the east, Tenth on the south and Monroe on the west." Except for the opening paragraph quoted above, the *Journal's* story was a press agent's handout.

A more informative story was carried by the *Capital* the day following the exhibition.

"The name of Barnum is inseparably connected with all that is mammoth, bewildering, startling and wonderful, and of all the entertainments he has brought out for the purpose of amusement or instruction the 'great moral show' which exhibited in Topeka yesterday is not by any means among the least. It was unfortunate that the weath-

er, which about this time is usually capricious, took a turn toward the north pole and thus diminished somewhat the number in attendance, yet notwithstanding this drawback the attendance both afternoon and evening was very large, the huge canvas, which seats some 7,000 people, being comfortably filled."

The *Capital* reported the parade in detail: "The crowd stood for more than two hours awaiting the coming of the best street parade ever seen in Topeka. Following the dog cart containing the

ing team, modeled in life size, gilded and burnished. A new and amusing feature followed on the top of a large van. Three highlanders in their native costume blew a merry Scotch song, through their squealing bag pipes. A herd of camels, loose, and hitched to chariots and a monster caliope (accent the i) formed an interesting part of the parade. A peacock chariot drawn by a string of diminutive ponies, were followed by a span of zebras driven to a buggy. Tom Thumb's carriage, the six performing cattle, another band and a monster chariot preceded the herd of elephants, some of them drawing chariots and smaller vehicles, and others decked with the picturesque houdah in which reclined dark-eyed odalisques. A band of negro men and women, concluded the procession which is pronounced the largest, longest, and most wonderful that has ever wound its length along the streets of this city."

While all of Topeka was watching the parade a thief was busily at work.

"This morning, as the family of Dr. Cooley, who lives on the corner of 7th and Lane streets were down on the avenue to see the procession," according to the *Capital*, October 12, "their house was entered by a burglar or burglars, and when they arrived home they found the contents of trunks, drawers and bureaus scattered all over the house. It is thought the burglars entered by the use of false keys as the windows were all fastened. The inside doors which Mrs. Cooley had carefully locked were broken from their hinges, and the whole house searched. Two young men who work at the asylum roomed in the house and it is thought had considerable money in their trunks. This was all taken and how much more it is impossible yet to determine. No clue can be obtained as to who the rascals were, but they were probably hangers on of Barnum's show."

A reporter of the *Capital* who happened to run in to General Tom Thumb in the corridors of the Gordon House was impressed by the General's cordiality. "The General is not as young as once and has grown rather more portly since we saw him last. He enjoys good health and seems to get as much pleasure out of this world as anyone. He has not been in Topeka, he says, since 1869, and expresses himself surprised at the strides she has made towards becoming a great metropolis. Hubbell a young dentist of this city is a nephew



The Grand Circus Royal issued this full color cover courier in 1881

*avant-courier* came a gorgeous band wagon containing a full membered band, clad in scarlet uniforms. Behind this, riding in pairs, were red hussars, dragoons, *cent grade*, lancers, and *chasseurs*. Five cages containing superb specimens of lions, tigers, leopards, hyenas and snakes. A chime of bells, suspended in a gilded van, next attracted attention only for a minute, as the prancing, glossy coated black trick stallions, each led by a groom, commanded general admiration. An immense car of nations, and gilded sculpture in wondrous profuseness next passed before the delighted spectators and then caravans and cages and another band wagon, a troop of military of different kinds; a gorgeous chariot of Neptune, with the sea god and his fly-



THE **CIRCUS ROYAL** GRAND  
ENG LISH  
**MENAGERIE**  
AND THE  
**GREAT ASTLEY'S MUSEUM AQUARIUM**  
COLOSSAL CONSOLIDATION OF BIG RAILROAD SHOWS  
JOHN HANDBERGER, Manager. WM. R. SCATTERGOOD, Treasurer. T. R. TOOLE, General Agent.



**THE \$25,000 ELECTRIC LIGHT AND A REAL STEAM FIRE ENGINE**  
No Change of Date. The Day is Positively Fixed.  
**THIS GREAT SHOW NEVER DIVIDES.**  
See date on last page of Cover.

Page three of the Circus Royal courier listed John Handenberger as manager and Col. T. R. Toole as general agent.

of the General's, and on this account he feels an interest in our city. The General was much interested in a group of Pottawatomie Indians who were on the street, but thought that the best way to dispose of the Indian question was to adopt the plan which Pharaoh inaugurated to dispose of the Israelites."

After the show had come and gone, the *Journal* commented, "This great fraud has come and gone. The Barnum part of it was not here, Barnum only selling the use of his name to draw a crowd. The European part of it was, we presume, the ten cent swindle that followed the main show. The birds, like eagles visits, were few and far between. The fact is that those who staid (sic) home have great cause to congratulate themselves, of those who attended we have heard but one expression of sentiment and that is disappointment."

The *Journal* on October 20, ran the following paragraph: "Young Cooley, charged with robbing his father's house the day Barnum's show was here, will have his trial next Monday. The time was postponed from this morning."

Toughs, cheats, swindlers, robbers, burglars, frequently followed shows, sometimes as independent entrepreneurs and other times as attaches of the circus, sharing their profits with the management. Burglaries were common during the parade and the show people were always accused, but, quite probably, in many instances, showmen received the recognition that rightly be-

longed to local hoodlums, such as young Cooley.

"Marshal Cochran," according to the *Journal*, October 13, "says there never were so few rough looking characters in Topeka as at present and the thieves and tramps that usually follow a show were not here yesterday or if they were, they kept very shady."

Barnum Day ended with the report of the *Commonwealth* that, "Geo. L. Rix, of Wichita, came up to attend the circus and went to Kansas City last night."

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A well advertised aggregation whose logo included the crest of the British royal house complete with motto *Dieu et Mon Droit* exhibited in the following Kansas towns in 1881 under the modest title of The Grand Circus Royal, English Menagerie, and the Great Astley's Museum, Aquarium & Colossal Consolidation of Big Railroad Shows: July 21, Marysville; July 22, Seneca; July 23, Hiawatha; July 26, Washington; July 27, Clyde; July 28, Concordia; July 29, Beloit; July 30, Minneapolis; August 4, Clay Center; August 5, Junction City; August 6, Council Grove; August 8, Burlington; August 9, Chanute; August 10, Oswego.

The Circus Royal boasted of "A Perfect Kingdom of Carnivalistic Offerings! TWO CIRCUSES! TWO CIRCUS RINGS! TWO SETS OF PERFORMERS!" The next two statements evade plausibility "5,000 Living Wild Beasts, Birds and Reptiles! 1,000 Men, Women, Horses and Ponies!" Is it permissible to count the fleas on the grave-robbing hyena? Does a man and a woman equal a horse and a pony?

Among the "Carnivalistic Offerings" were "Five Golden Chariots, 40 Scarlet and Golden Dens, 24 Cages and Vans, Wild Indians, Wild Beasts Loose in the Streets, Beautiful Zebras, Egyptian Dromedaries, Racing Ships of the Desert, Bactrian Camels, Sacred Bulls, Three Open Dens of Beasts, Roman Senators, Neopolitan Beauties, Beautiful Ladies, Darling Children, Amazonian Charioteers, A Herd of Indian Ponies, Olympian Games, Roman Gladiators, Mardi-Gras Characters."

One of the features shown in a cut was the "New York built STEAM FIRE ENGINE!" The engine was used to power the dynamo that supplied electricity to the tents, but this was no ordinary engine, for the "entire Fire Apparatus, Electric Light &c., cost \$25,000 in Gold! This one feature alone being worth Double the Price of Admission as a novelty. How many thousands there are that have heard and read of a real Steam Fire Engine, yet never have seen one? Its Mechanical Architecture is par-

excellence, and it is beautiful with elaborately polished SILVER AND GOLD DOMES! AND NICKEL AND BRONZED SMOKE STACKS, CYLINDERS, &c."

Prominent in the advertising was an anonymous "Young and Beautiful Woman Verily Placed Inside a Monster Cannon and simultaneously, with a terrific explosion, IS SHOT THROUGH SPACE LIKE ELECTRICITY! This Most Extraordinary Magnificently Awful Feat Beggars Description."

Like all shows of the time riding was of the utmost importance and the Circus Royal claimed the "Only Miss Mollie Brown, Only Mlle. Tournour, Only Mlle. Tuila, Only Mlle. Olympia, Only Alexis E. Scarfer."

Mollie Brown received individual mention as "The Supreme Equestrienne Queen! Undisputed Champion of all Champion Bareback Riders! The only Lady that ever threw a Backward Somersault from the back of a stark-naked horse while running at full speed." Ac-

Newspaper ad used by Circus Royal during the 1881 season.

**The Mighty Mastodon Coming!**  
IN ALL ITS  
**GLORY OF SATURNALIA!**  
THE GRAND  
**CIRCUS ROYAL**  
AND  
**English Menagerie,**  
In Combination with the  
**GREAT ASTLEY'S MUSEUM!**  
AQUARIUM, AVIARY, HIPPODROME,  
Egyptian Caravan and Royal Amphitheatre.  
A GLORIOUS AND COLOSSAL  
CONSOLIDATION OF BIG RAILROAD SHOWS!



**SIX ACRES OF TENTED FIELDS**  
An Enterprise Surpassing in Magnitude, Outrivaling in Splendor, Overwhelming in Attractions any  
**Amusement Concorporation**  
Ever thought of since the world was formed. Brains and capital have been combined with experience to make this Great Show unequivocally and truly beyond all heretofore successful attempts.  
**THE MONSTER AND IMPOSING SHOW OF THE UNIVERSE**  
AND JUSTLY STYLED  
**THE MIGHTY MONARCH OF THE WORLD**  
**5,000 LIVING WILD BEASTS,**  
MONKEYS, BIRDS AND REPTILES!  
**A CAR LOAD OF OCEAN MARVELS!**  
**TWO CIRCUSES!**  
TWO CIRCUS RINGS!  
**TWO SETS OF PERFORMERS**  
REPRESENTING ALL NATIONS.  
**1000 Men, Women, Children, Horses, Ponies,**



cording to the sentence there might become confusion as to who was "running at full speed," but there is no doubt that it was the horse that was "stark-naked."

And all of this for only "The Usual Price of Admission."

For the exhibition at Hiawatha, Saturday, July 23, the advertising included "The Largest Elephant Ever Seen." In Chanute the elephant was claimed to be 130 years old.

The Hiawatha *Dispatch*, July 28, reported, "There was a big crowd at the circus, last Saturday. All the seating room was full, and many sat around on the ground or stood up. The show was as good as any that has stopped here during the past several years. The usual tricks and games to take in the granger were to be seen, but nobody got bitten that did not bite at them. One of these games was a side ticket office where tickets to the show were sold at 75 instead of 50 cents. Mr. Boyce was swindled in this manner and on finding it out, gave the operator 25 cents worth of his mind, which caused the swindling outfit to vamoose hastily."

In a separate story the *Dispatch* spoke of the weather.

"There was no rush of people away from the circus at the close of the performance last Saturday, because a storm was brewing overhead, but nearly everybody paid ten cents and stayed to the concert. The rain poured and the people crowded down into the ring, and the performers danced around promiscuously among the people, and shouts of 'whoop, let 'er rain!' were heard all over the tent. It played out the concert, but there was no 'kicking' because the show did not go on, but everybody would have paid another admission if it would have kept up the performance of the elements. The women were not particular about getting their bonnets or finery wet, but stood up and took the rain as gracefully as the leaky tent would permit."

The advance car of the show received mention in the columns of the *Concordia Blade* when it arrived in town on the 13th of July. "When the great and beautiful ornamented car containing the enormous posters of the Great Circus Royal, English Menagerie and the Astley's Museum rolled into town on the Central Branch Wednesday it was fun to see the little boys, and some big ones, hustling down to the railroad to see it. It was something of a show itself."

A week later the *Blade* reported, "Mr. Charles B. Lawrence special Agent in charge of the second brigade of the Circus Royal, is in the city today with his four assistants putting up and distribut-

ing new bills and circulars. He has sent out from this point a score of men in every direction to thoroughly bill the county anew."

The Circus Royal used a number of short statements scattered through the news columns of the *Blade*, like the following:

"There is a walrus with the circus that will show here on the 28th. Who wouldn't give fifty cents to see even that? But you can see the whole show for that."

Circus day in Concordia, Thursday, July 28, came and went without the *Blade* commenting on the size and quality of the performance or the crowd that



Little Molly Brown, well known to Kansas circus goers, appeared with Circus Royal in 1881.

attended. The *Blade* was published every Friday, which meant that the paper was put to bed Thursday, too early for a review of the show with the limited staff of a small town weekly, and the following week the story would hardly be news. So why bother?

The *Blade* did have a bit of real news that appeared in the July 29 issue. "A serious accident happened to one of the hands employed by the Circus Royal when in this city. The train started unexpectedly and threw him from the top of a coach on his head, and it was thought fractured his skull."

The same problem with publication dates occurred in Beloit, where the Circus Royal exhibited Friday, July 29, and the *Gazette* published on Saturday. The situation was even worse for the Thursday, August 4, date, Clay Center, for the *Dispatch* published every Thursday.

The Council Grove *Republican*, reporting on the exhibition of Saturday, August 6, stated: "The Circus Royal was in some respects good, but in others a grand fraud. The management had several swindling games to extort money from the unsophisticated. At the entrance they were selling tickets above the regular price and in every way possible trying to extort money. The me-

nagerie was fair; the circus in some respects good; but the concert was the snidest the locals ever saw presented to a respectable audience. Any show that would give such an entertainment and call it a 'concert' ought to be everlastingly bounced."

The *Labette County Democrat*, Oswego, August 12, had a good deal to say about the exhibitions of Wednesday, August 10.

"The Circus and Its Incidents.

"The 'grand Circus Royal and the great Astley Museum' exhibited in this city on Wednesday afternoon and evening to quite a large attendance at each exhibition. Their street parade in the morning was fine and effective, and their menagerie was a very fair one, while the performances were quite good--everything they did being very well done.

"They had a rough crowd along with them, however, and there were many complaints--whether well or ill-founded--of swindling of various parties, in the matter of making change when purchasing admission tickets. We know there were several roughs among their men, one of whom discharged a pistol inside the canvas of the menagerie department a short time before the ring performances commenced, at another party, also said to be an employee--fortunately without injury--frightening very much the ladies and children who were looking at the animals; and when Marshal Wooden undertook to arrest the man who did the shooting he was re-sisted by several of the circus men and the prisoner taken from the officer two or three times before he could get off with him, which he was able to accomplish only after several of our determined townsmen had come to his assistance. In the course of the disturbance, Mr. Stapp, the livery stable man, who was assisting Marshal Wooden, was struck on the head and severely wounded by one of the ruffians. Another of them raised a club to brain the Marshal from behind, and was only stopped in his murderous design by the presentation of a revolver by one of our young men with the intimation that he must drop that club or take the consequences, and he happily concluded to drop it. For a time there was every appearance of serious trouble, but the party arrested was finally taken uptown where Squire Keirseby fined him \$5 and costs, for shooting off fire-arms within the city limits, which he paid and was dismissed. We are glad to say that during the subsequent ring performance the most excellent order was maintained and every thing passed off satisfactorily in every respect.



"There seemed to be a more than ordinary following of gamblers and other vicious characters connected with this circus, one of whom had the impudence to set up his swindling wheel of fortune in one of the most public places in the city. It seemed strange to us that he should have been permitted to set up and run his gambling device all day on the public streets to tempt and corrupt, as well as cheat and swindle the people, without being stopped by the city authorities. If there is an ordinance forbidding it, it should have been enforced. If there is no such ordinance, the sooner it is passed and enforced the better."

The Oswego *Independent* was of the same opinion and reported that, "The grandest imposition that was ever thrust upon a community visited our city last Wednesday, being styled 'The Grand Circus Royal.' To say that it was a 'snide' show would not convey an idea of the miserable, fraudulent and trashy concern. A large crowd of people were in the city, thinking they were to see something at least SECOND-RATE, but a grander mistake was never made by a people, nor was a crowd ever more badly taken in. The attaches at the THING seemed to be a pack of swindlers and confidence men, devoid of principle and honor, thinking of nothing but how to beat the natives, and in this they are wonderful adepts. We say to our neighboring towns that are to be afflicted with this abortion of a circus, to beware of the 'Grand Circus Royal.'"

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The Great Leviathan of the Land, John Robinson's Great World's Exposition, Electric Light Show, Aquarium, Animal Conservatory and Strictly Moral Circus, came to Humboldt, Kansas, Thursday, May 12, 1881, on a "Royal Train of Fifty Palace Cars."

Robinson boasted of a myriad of features including Edison's electric light, a Gallery of Art and Science, a herd of elephants, 100 Shetland ponies, performing baboons and monkeys, fifty superb cages, a shoal of sea lions, a modern Hercules and twenty lady equestriennes. The parade was announced to be "A Stream of Splendor."

All of these stupendous new features were ignored by the Humboldt Union when on May 14, it ran the following review:

"John Robinson's circus had a rather poor day here on Thursday. The rain which was threatened in the early morning came down in the forenoon, and put a damper upon the attendance. However the show was a good one, and was prettily well attended."

In spite of Robinson's advertised claim of "50 Palace Cars," the *Independent* could only find 27 when the show played Oswego, Thursday, May 5.

The *Independent* made a hostile report in its columns on May 7. "John Rob-

JOHN ROBINSON'S  
GREAT  
**World's Exposition!**  
ELECTRIC LIGHT SHOW,  
AQUARIUM, ANIMAL CONSERVATORY  
AND STRICTLY MORAL CIRCUS.  
*Thoroughly re-organized, vastly enlarged, re-equipped  
and out-fitted with entirely new appointments.*  
Will Exhibit at  
JERSEYVILLE,  
**MONDAY, May 23rd.**



Among the myriads of Novelties we introduce for the present tenting season is the Brush Electric Light—infinitely more preferable, and for transportation purposes, more practical. THAN THE COMMON ELECTRIC LIGHT. This light completely dwarfs all other methods of illumination, and thoroughly metamorphoses night into day, differing in ray like a tropical sun in a cloudless day. It perfectly lights with a moon-day effulgence A RADIUS OF AT LEAST HALF A LEAGUE, yet while its illumination is so brilliant and perfect, it eliminates no heat, nor does it strain the weakest and most sensitive eyes in gazing on it.

In Every Sense a Mammoth Exhibition!

1,000 Men and Horses! 50 Dens of Animals!

50 Shetland Ponies!

Vast Quadruple Troupe of  
Equestrians, Athletes,  
and Gymnasts!

Embodying in one vast and unparalleled combination the

**Monarchs of the Profession!**

GRAND AQUARIUM

EXQUISITE LIVING MARINE MONSTERS, THE RAREST OF NATURE'S PRODUCTIONS

John Robinson brought his World's Exposition to Kansas in 1881. Circus World Museum collection.

Robinson's Circus showed to large audiences here Thursday afternoon and evening, and as has been the case for many years, the people got 'took in,' the menagerie being 'thin' and the ring performances, with two or three exceptions, gauzy and stale."

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James T. Johnson & Co's., Circus and Trained Animals advertised in the Independence *Kansan* for an exhibition in that city for Monday, June 13, 1881. Johnson and Company was a Kansas show out of Scranton. The *Kansan* named William Jerome as Johnson's "advertising agent."

Following the 13th the *Kansan* makes no mention of an appearance, and, to the contrary, hints, without providing any details, that Independence was a blown day.

The *Kansan* commented, June 15, that, "The show didn't pan out. The boys are saving their nickels and holding their breath for the fourth."

On Wednesday, June 15, Johnson played Chetopa. Everything about the show was advertised in the *Advance* ads being new: "new wagons, new harness, magnificent and costly wardrobe, banners, plumes, &c." In larger type the show announced "New Waterproof Canvas, Illuminated by our Electric Light." The electric light on a tiny mud show in 1881 is indeed impressive.

The ad in the *Advance* urged people to see "the Grand Street Parade at 10:30 a.m. Professor Charles Pezold's Silver Cornet Band, in our NEW MAGNIFICENT GOLDEN BAND CHARIOT, Drawn by ten beautiful horses, elegantly bedecked with gay trappings. The funniest canine clown team, with the old clown himself. Beautiful ladies accompanied by gorgeous knights, in brilliant armor, on elegant caparisoned horses, and last and least the old original January reclining in the lap of February, with old 'March on'—his last legs. We are too well known in this, our native heath and home, to say more than that we have spared neither time, trouble or expense to make our circus department first class in every particular. Presenting to you in rapid success some twenty different stars, as brilliant as any who illuminate the arenic firmament. This, with our stud of trained horses, school of educated dogs, are the wonder of the age. The whole interspersed with the witticisms of three of the most brilliant clowns that grace the profession. Replete with chaste songs, witty jokes and antic merriment, will give you a performance of sterling worth, and wondrous feats, that Chetopa may justly feel proud of."

The performance was headed by Blue Rocket, the Fire King Leaping Horse.

Near the bottom of the ad was the notation, "Wanted to Buy--Eight to ten good teams wanted on show day."

"Yesterday was a pretty lively day in our city in consequence of the circus," the *Advance* commented. "Our opinion is that a good many harvesters were set aside on this very important day."

From Chetopa the show moved on to Columbus, Thursday, June 16.

Research funded by grants from: Wolfe's Camera Shops, Inc., Topeka, Kansas and First National Bank of Kansas, Topeka.



# CIRCUS LIFE AND ADVENTURE OF ADAM BARDY

Adam Bardy's new, revised book now includes 166 pages of interesting reading, as he tells of his life with the circus and of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus tent fire during the summer of 1944, when the big top went up in flames. Adam vividly describes the very start of this devastating fire which took the lives of more than 100 people on a summer day in Hartford, Conn. on July 6, 1944.

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his "boxing days" while traveling with the Coleman Bros. carnival in the 1930s, as well as his life with the gypsies, where he learned the art of fortune telling. Many more fascinating experiences of Adam Bardy's life round out this volume.

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